

Covenant and Calamity: Noah and the Ark

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TEXT

Now the **earth was corrupt in God's sight**, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

- all seems so wrong at this **early point in world history**
- **negative view of "flesh"** - this view will evolve
- **response to corruption and violence** - calamity (remember the post-exilic context of the authors)
 - **flawed understanding** of exile of Jews to Babylon
- destruction of flesh and "the earth" one comes from the other
- **question of divine motivation behind imposition or forbearance of calamity**
- other questions, other cultures - a **local cross-cultural parallel**
 - Neil Mikkonen recalls that when he was in his mid-teens, an elder of the Katzie Salish told him. The Legend of the Salmon, Bear and Raven
 - Issue is harmony between clans

There was a time when the Great Spirit and His Sister, the Thunderbird, saw that all was not right with the world. So They called The Raven, the Bear and the Salmon together and said that They were going to create a Great Flood to cleanse the land.

When the plants and animals were all assembled and the great canoe was finished, the Raven, the Bear and the Salmon began arguing over whose clan should provide the two of the peoples to inhabit the canoe.

The Thunderbird considered all their arguments; then said that she would choose two elders and two children from each clan and decide their fate later.

The Thunderbird told them all would be well if they could work together in harmony.

After the flood, when the waters went back into the ocean, the Great Spirit sent all the animals and plants to their place. The Thunderbird said to the people; "**You have shown you can work together, therefore I will spare you all; if the children each marry one from another Clan.**" Thus the Katzie People came to be.

TEXT

Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks.

- the inimitable Bill Cosby, for the audio visit
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0KHt8xrQkk>
 - detail: cubit - standard for measures of length among the Hebrews. They derived it from the Babylonians, but a similar measure was used in Egypt
 - The length variously estimated, a double standard, and because we have no undisputed example
 - The original cubit was the length of the forearm, from the elbow to the end of the middle finger, indefinite for a scientific standard
 - Babylonian double standard, the so-called royal cubit and the ordinary one
- detail makes the imaginary real, introduces the element of stewardship, how do we care for our buildings, our vessels, each other; **connects with the theme of covenant**

TEXT

I will **establish my covenant with you**; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive.

- initial covenant of survival
- Contemporary example, L'Arche; Jean Vanier

What I have learned from (people with intellectual disabilities), in their humility and their humiliations, is that we are all vulnerable people. Each one of us is important, especially the weakest among us. In our vulnerability we are easily hurt, and we have elaborate systems of self protection which keep us from being open with each other. We need each other, and yet we are deeply afraid of this need. Our fear estranges us from our own weakness, and keeps us from exercising the fullness of our humanity in caring for each other, individually and as a society.

TEXT

And Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.

The rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights.

(T)he waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered;

And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred and fifty days.

But **God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark**. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided;

- **Universal plea of victims**, does God remember, care, resolve to assist?

TEXT

At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

(A)nd **Noah removed the covering of the ark**, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying.

Then God said to Noah, ‘Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—**so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.**’

- a new creation story
- a new divine attitude? (Process theology)

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelt the pleasing odour, **the Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of humankind . . . nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.**

- anthropomorphic projection
- never curse, never destroy
- never again a **universal punishment**
- recognize anew the mysterious evil intent within humans, **resolves to be faithful to humanity despite such intent**
- an **idyllic commitment**

As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.’

OUTCOMES

In the process to struggling with the muck and murkiness of life, God is influenced by humans - God, out of generosity remains faithful to humanity despite humanity’s quibbles and attitudes - because God is not human, but God

1) We learn more about God than humanity in this particular story.

2) As Rowan Williams notes, God is for us, for the longer term:

As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.’

3) One wonders how Japan will tell its story in twenty of fifty centuries time, how a nation influenced by Shintoism and Buddhism will recall its calamities.

4) Jews and Christians recall how god responded positively to a calamity, which itself allowed a culture to start afresh, which should cause Christians to recall the value of an appropriately offered confession, which is our verbal desire to begin anew, this Lent and always

Amen.