

September 13, 2026

Marion Weekly Update

Sermon "A Noah Spirit" Genesis 6:5-8, Matthew 5:3-10

Noah's Ark is a familiar story for most of us. Some also refer to the story as "The Great Flood". My hope is that today we'll gain some additional perspective on the story that will inspire all of us to adopt a "Noah"-like spirit that will build our faith and improve our world.

We begin rather dark. In a few moments this will make sense as to why we need to in order to understand some symbolism.

Calling the story Noah's Ark rather than The Great Flood is much more comfortable. We can look at the pictures of happy animals and people floating atop the water very safely. That focuses on the ark. The flood on the other hand pushes us to the front of the story. It makes us recognize what would be lurking in the destruction underneath the water and waves.

In the flood, there is a lot of innocent death. Animals that had done nothing wrong. Scripture announces them more as collateral damage than anything. Yet they were all destroyed in the story. There would have been pregnant women, babies and children. All swept up and killed. Most of us would consider unborn babies, babies and young children innocent.

That's a hard thing to reconcile. And there are certainly ways to do that, but that's not the point of this message. IF you'd like to talk about it more let me know.

That it is uncomfortable has led to some interesting reasonings.

The animals had become wicked and corrupt too. That's a nice try but doesn't exist in scripture.

God knew the children would have grown up to be wicked and evil. Another nice try, but still something to wrestle with. Is it just to execute someone before they've committed the crime? Most would say "no".

God is God and we're not so it's not to us to question. Unfortunately it is. If we are to be imitators of God we need to understand God's character. If Jesus doesn't seem the sort to do this sort of thing, and Jesus is God, and God's character doesn't change where does that leave us?

These answers just create more questions. But the wreckage WILL make a bigger point.

But first, let's look at the character of Noah in contrast to that of everyone else, apparently even his family. All we know is that God called Noah righteous and everyone else wicked. The only real description of the wickedness was that they had become "violent".

This is somewhat in keeping with much of God's problems with Israel in scripture. Over and over again they were abusing one another, exploiting one another, and harming one another. These could all be described as different kinds of violence.

There was no discussion of morality. Though what we've seen is that morality is often just a symptom of character. Godly character is the foundation. The fruits of the Spirit are one good place to find character points. Proverbs has wisdom as well. I suggest that here we might find who Noah was and who the others were not.

Additionally we have the beatitudes and that is where we're going to look today to see some other clues as to what faithfulness of character looks like and doesn't. The blessings come for the faithfulness.

The poor in spirit. This is talking about humility and a need for God in our lives. Noah would have been humble while the rest arrogant and proud.

Those who mourn. Mourning requires love and appreciation for others. Otherwise there is no genuine sense of loss. The rest of the world would then have been callous and unconcerned about one another.

The meek. Again, this is a quietness and humility mixed with quiet confidence. Noah may have been this while the others brash and bullish.

Hungering for righteousness. Noah wanted to do what was correct and right. This is faithfulness. The others would then have had no concern for right and wrong. Often this results in selfishness and convenience. Hunger for power and gain regardless of how it affects others.

The merciful. Noah would have been able to experience empathy and compassion. The other likely harsh judgment and even overreactive punishment.

Pure in heart. Noah's intentions would likely have been motivated by a faithfulness to God.

The others intentions likely would have had ulterior motives without thought of right or wrong.

The peacemakers. Peacemakers can be open other perspectives, admit wrongdoing, compromise, and want to see the best for all. The opposite is hardheadedness, pride, and a desire to steamroll, divide, and stir up conflict.

The persecuted. We don't know if Noah was persecuted. Portrayals of the story often have people making fun of him but scripture has absolutely no reference to this. Even so, to be the sole decent person in the midst of a world of wickedness must carry a heavy toll. Even if just the weight of not giving in to temptation and staying faithful.

Hearing all of that, do we see a lot of the world of Noah in our world today? Absolutely we do. It's sad the frequency with which we see someone who seems like a Noah at first but after a little time reveals themselves to be more like the rest of the people in Noah's time.

This is why we desperately need to have the spirit of Noah. Stand strong. Know what Godly character actually is and live into it. Even if it goes against the world around us. The world can't come into faithfulness and faithful living if no one goes first in it. Our example is the world's opportunity.

Genesis doesn't record Noah doing any preaching, which is another assumption we make.

Peter says Noah was a preacher or a "herald" but Matthew says no one knew anything was wrong or coming before the flood hit. Maybe splitting the difference that was Noah's preaching. He lived in faithfulness as an example.

This leads us to the symbol. The rainbow is the take away symbol that Christians hang onto. Believe it or not though the way we do is often very limited considering what it is.

The actual scripture doesn't say "rainbow". It's translated that way often because of tradition. But the actual term is that God "hung His bow in the clouds." This distinction matters. While scripture records the statement that God won't destroy the earth by flood again, the flood is actually representative of something much larger.

The bow God hangs up is a military bow of war. Kind of like the old gunslinger hanging up his six shooters. Notice the direction the bow faces. It faces up, aimed away from the world. What does the symbol mean?

It means that God has ceased being at war with humanity. Here's where the flood comes into perspective. War at the time this story was written, and we see it throughout the Old Testament, meant completely annihilating your enemy. Including animals and livestock, women and children.

Being at war with God is obviously bound for a loss. The flood was utter destruction with one family spared to start over again. That was the war. God was the victor. And for whatever reason God declared that on God's part there would be peace. The hung up bow is a sign of peace between God and humanity on the part of God.

Which makes it ironic that people of faith have chosen to go to war with other people over the use of the rainbow. Aggression and anger seem an odd way to honor a symbol of peace between God and humanity. And to feed into stoking the harsh interactions that brought about the destruction in the first place.

And here is the second aspect of Noah's spirit that I hope is inspiring to us. Because the situation is dire. God may have ceased being at war with humanity, but scripture still indicates a judgment one day for each of us.

That peace would seem to indicate given the success of many wicked people and the difficulty facing many Godly people there is a lack of hard line divine judgment in this world. Like the people who didn't see the flood coming, there are many, those who claim faith and those who don't alike, are living into a judgment that they are oblivious to.

Noah's spirit wasn't to take part in their violence, faithlessness, and ignorance. What he did was take care of the people and things God put in his orbit. Most directly his family and the creatures in his care. He built a boat to protect them, to save them from the judgment that was coming.

We need to be Noahs. First we let our example of faithfulness shine. It isn't easy in this world to keep on the path of Christ. But as I said, if we don't, who will? And where will the example for others to follow be?

Then how can we inspire those around us? The ark we are building is encouragement and invitation to live into a more Godly life. It's noticing when someone in our relational orbit is missing out on those core character traits that we see revealed in scripture and trying to help them develop into them. It pulls the world around us away from the world of Noah and more into a world that is tight with God.

I believe in the story that's part of Noah's purpose after the flood subsides. He's got a new start with people he's connected to. He's got the answer to how the world is supposed to operate and now he can influence the new start in a way that is faithful. That is the ark he's intended to build for the future of humanity.

Today that future is in dire need of that same kind of ark. It needs a lot of Noahs to take seriously the purpose of leading those around us in a good and Godly path. Part of that is inviting them and encouraging them to be a consistent part of a community of faith that is purposed in living out the example of Jesus Christ.

It's clear in scripture that faith lived outside of the influence of a community that is genuinely God centered has a good chance of either fading away or becoming misguided. The willingness of this community of faith to take faith and put it to practical, real purpose in the world is becoming more and more rare in a religious world given over to entertainment and culture rather than authentic love of God expressed by loving others.

If you've ever wanted to be like a Bible hero, now is our time. Now is the moment. Step up. Be a Noah. Be the example and guide those around you into a faith that is deep and deeply expressed in the midst of our community.

BIBLE STUDY 2 Timothy 1

Like 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy has disagreement regarding who actually wrote it. Some say Paul, others that it was a later perhaps disciple of Paul writing in his name. Some of the factors at play are helpful in reading the letter.

For starters, the idea that someone else wrote it isn't so scandalous as one might think. In that time it wasn't uncommon for someone to write in another person's name, particularly if they were a close follower of a teacher or such. Even after the teacher's demise students might communicate in their name. The respect was that they were simply passing along the ideas of their beloved teacher to the best of their ability and integrity. We use terms like "fraud" and "plagiarism" but that is an "us" issue. Our time and place, our rules. They had different rules in a different time and different place.

In the letter it's clear that the church has a formed structure. Not just the Jerusalem church but the Gentile church as well. There is a more "cemented" sense of what entails a legitimate gospel among believers. In the letter Timothy is listed as a third generation Christian following grandmother and mother. There are defined and delineated roles and positions in the church. All of this suggests a later writing than would have been in Paul's lifetime. In Paul's life the church would have been more fledgling and still forming and finding its way. This is what leads many to think it was not Paul doing the writing. Some date the letter as long as thirty years after Paul's death.

On the other hand there is the intimacy of the letter. Timothy is clearly loved and cared for. He is addressed with an affection and specificity the suggests the writer is very much the person it claims to be.

Either way there is much to be gained from studying it. That said the context of any letter matters. The state of the church's formation is part of the equation for certain.

After a typical greeting there is a sense of Paul's ideas about how his Jewishness connects to his Christianity. For Paul Christianity is a natural progression from Judaism. It is fulfillment and continuation. He acknowledges regard for his own ancestors who would have been observantly Jewish and this isn't an issue. While relationships between Christians and Jews today run the gamut from full on antisemitic to a passionate support, for him the divide isn't an issue. One led directly to the other. Romans highlights this as Paul is clearly sorrowful for his own people who have rejected Jesus. He desperately wants them to come to belief. To Paul they were missing on the natural fulfillment of a faith that had existed for centuries as it carries on with the Messiah in full view and leadership.

From his own progression Paul encourages Timothy. His own family had a Jewish side and his maternal side had already taken the step to commit to Christ. Timothy followed suit, which is being celebrated.

Paul's pride at Timothy's faith is encouraged. The image of "fanning a flame" is that of a campfire that burns for days. That fire is life to those in the camp. Every so often it needs fed and nurtured. Otherwise it will go out and then be of no value. Timothy's faith, and ours, is the same.

Being in community with other faithful believers is key to keeping our faith lively and active. Inevitably the further people get from something consistently fueling their faith the more it fades. That or it takes detours and becomes tuned less to God and more to the person. We need one another to keep us strong and committed to living a genuine and authentic faith rather than reverting to simply reacting to circumstances around us.

Paul mixes together encouragement along with a reminder. In and out of the discussion Paul uses his own example as a source of inspiration. "testimony about the Lord or of me His prisoner." "Join me in suffering for the gospel." These are encouragements and invitations for Timothy. He is reminded that through God he can be bold. He can be loving. He can have and exercise sound judgement. All of this is significant for a young pastor trying to lead a Gentile congregation. We do well to be reminded of this ourselves as we live out our faith day by day. In the midst of this is a confession of faith. The confession very clearly and directly addresses salvation and holiness, the sovereignty of God in acting through Christ to offer us grace, and the promise of eternal life. What is Timothy being charged to do? Keep this message safe and sound. And pass it along.

Suffering is a theme that Paul never shies away from. Even in inspiring Timothy there is no avoiding that the life of an apostle or a strong Christian leader is likely to bring pain and hardship. Paul didn't escape it and neither should Timothy expect to. Nevertheless, that suffering isn't a mark of shame but a badge of honor and faithfulness.

There is a caution in this for us today. Reading Paul's words it seems that suffering is a sign of genuine faith. It must be kept in mind that this was first century Rome where to the Jews the faith was blasphemy (punishable by death) and to Rome the faith was treason for stealing authority from Caesar (also punishable up to death). It isn't 2026 America.

We aren't living under anything like those early Christians. We worship freely. We can exercise our faith freely. Punishment comes from breaking the law. And by in large the pushback received by non Christians is less about a problem with our faith and more about the rudeness, arrogance, and/or hypocrisy of the Christians that are in their face. Sometimes Christians try to force situations where they can claim "persecution" because of how they read these words of Paul. Doing so is counterproductive to spreading the gospel.

After this reminder of what comprises the center of our faith, Paul gives a sense of "guarding". First Paul talks about why he isn't ashamed for his various sufferings. It is his confidence in Jesus Christ. He knows his faith is well placed. Everything Paul is has been entrusted to Jesus. His energy, livelihood, reputation, relationships, and his very life have been put in the hands of Christ. He trusts that Jesus will guard all of that and keep that trust until the day Paul meets Him face to face. Whatever Paul has given will come back to him.

Once again using his own example to lead to what he asks of Timothy the sense of “guarding” shifts. Not it is Timothy who is asked to be a protector. Paul has given him the precious gift of the gospel message. Not only that but Timothy has the privilege of passing that message on. Paul has seen firsthand how the gospel can be twisted and misused. Timothy is being trusted to handle the message well. The gospel has a form that is set and not to be tampered with. So Paul instructs his protégé to rely on the Holy Spirit for the help to ensure the message is transmitted boldly, correctly, and in the love of Christ.

The first chapter/introduction ends with another reminder to Timothy of what leadership can cost. You will experience both betrayal as well as wonderful support.

The first example is another instance(think John Mark in Acts) of where Paul seems to have been abandoned in Asia. There is the generic “everyone” and then naming a couple names for the incident. The point is that even those we trust will sometimes let us down. Sometimes the deepest knives in the back come from the people closest to us.

On the other hand there are those who will go to the ends of the earth to help us. They will support us at great sacrifice and cost to themselves. Their love isn’t affected by inconvenience. Their loyalty is beyond measure or compare. This is the heartening side of doing ministry.

As the letter begins there is a truly beautiful blend of affection, encouragement, instruction, and honesty. The words to Timothy in many ways we can take in to our own hearts and spirits.

Each of us have those who have mentored us and some of us have been mentors ourselves. The world will attempt to compromise our faith. Keep it close and protect it. There will always be a mix of good and bad, faithful and frauds. And in the end, the example of Christ, the promise of redemption, and the truth of new life are worth staying true to who we are in Him.