

AUG 4, 2024

# *Marion* weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

July 28 sermon— ‘Heroes and Villains : Noah’ Genesis 6:9-18, Genesis 9:18-29

Our subject for Heroes and Villains this week is Noah. Hero or villain? Most I believe consider him a hero and with good reason. We’ll focus specifically on Noah the man soon. Beforehand there are some other context points that are useful.

To get at the heart of a story sometimes we need to give ourselves permission to take a break from some of the contentious points involved in the telling. Exploring such points is good and very useful for our faith and getting a stronger grasp of scripture, no question. That said, they can become rabbit holes we dive down that distract us from the more significant point or points being made. It’s not unlike someone communicating life changing wisdom but in the process there are one or two details that aren’t completely accurate (is the tomato fruit or vegetable, is the color scarlet or red, a hamburger technically isn’t ham, etc.). Parsing the detail at the expense of the larger point that isn’t affected by that detail is a tragedy.

In the story of Noah and the great flood there are questions. We’re not going to answer them here because that’s not our point. If you find yourself down one of these rabbit holes no worries. Tease it out. Just don’t let it distract from the bigger, theologically significant issues at hand.

How did a 600 year old man build this giant boat singlehandedly? In Kentucky they built a scale replica of the ark and it took them how many years with tons of manpower, resources, and equipment from our modern age?

If Christ is God fully revealed to us, does it seem “Jesusy” to wipe out every man, woman, and child? How many animals were taken on the ark? Depending on where you read in the story it’s either a pair of each kind OR a pair of unclean animals and seven pair?

Why was there concern for clean and unclean when the Mosaic law had not been instituted yet? In fact Abraham hadn’t even come along yet.

An example from this list about the unnecessary rabbit hole is his age. The question is honest. How could he do it? That said, this isn’t a story about how an old man builds a boat. It’s much grander than that and more far reaching.

The story itself is pretty straightforward. Humanity has become a depraved version of what was intended. God has decided that perhaps this was a regrettable experiment and it’s time to just wipe the whole thing out. But there is a problem. There is one good man left.

In a kind of forerunner to the story of Lot in Sodom, God creatively answers this conundrum of unfairly punishing someone innocent. Make a way to save that person. The answer for Noah and every other living creature is the ark. In an interesting turn, God goes a step more gracious.

The only obligation is to save the innocent. There is no sense that Noah’s family is innocent. Noah is the only righteous one mentioned. Even so, the family is saved. Noah’s wife, three sons and their wives are also spared. The only reason for this would to give humanity a second chance. In this singular move wrath gives way to at least some modicum of grace.

Flooding is the means of destruction, which no one had experienced before. As he is ridiculed for building a giant boat that seems pointless to everyone else, Noah has the last laugh. The floods come, he, his family, and the animals are closed up inside and the world is swept away. The floods rise for a long time and for an even longer time they float on the water waiting for it to subside. Once it does we have the story of Noah sending several birds out to check to see if land is dry and safe to exit. When it’s clear all is clear, they all head out to replenish the world.

A final note on the end of the ordeal happens when Noah has too much to drink. If read as it is written, this would have happened years after the flood had ended. I was curious as it said Noah planted a vineyard and drank wine made from that harvest. Apparently it takes two to seven years for grapes to go from seed to fruit able to be fermented to wine. We don’t know why he got drunk just that he did. We also know that after he passed out naked in his tent. His son Ham saw him, and did something

degrading. We don't know what was done, but we do know that it was enough for Noah to be incredibly upset when he came around. When Ham tried to point out Noah's condition to his brothers, they respectfully covered their father with a blanket, walking in backwards so they wouldn't see him lying there.

When Noah awakes, I think we can presume with a hangover, his is angry at Ham and pronounces a curse upon him. He also pronounces a kind of blessing on the other two. This sets the stage for some of the conflict to come later in the Promised Land. Noah dies years later at the ripe age of 950 years old.

So what are some of the lessons from Noah?

One of the most significant is that no matter how big the crowd is, we don't have to go along with it. Noah faced an entire world that had gone awry from God. He remained Godly. In the end our personal integrity may be all we have. Ultimately when we stand before God it won't be on the coattails of others, it will be on our own merits. When it all comes together we see through Noah's example that God can be trusted to honor the life of the faithful. Even if it's only one life in a million.

While we may not be redeemed on the coattails of another, we do see in Noah's life that in this world we can greatly benefit from another's character. Noah's family benefited from Noah's character. They weren't spared for their own faithfulness. They were spared for his. Sometimes our character can buy grace for another.

Most of us have had this experience. We vouch for someone and they get a job offer, entrance to a group, invitation to an event, put to the head of the line in a waiting queue or some other benefit they did nothing themselves to earn. Most of us have been the beneficiary of the same. Having good character doesn't just open up doors for ourselves, it does for someone else.

In the story of Noah it opened more than being spared. His Godly character opened the doorway of hope for God Himself. God had resigned to destruction. Noah somehow persuaded God that sparing his family and giving humanity another shake was worthwhile.

We do well to remember that the character we possess has the possibility to change and even save a life or lives if we use our influence. When we are given that opportunity we need to thank God for the one who opened the door for us and treat that trust as sacred.

Noah reminds us that even heroes have their darker moments. Getting drunk and cursing his son qualifies. We don't know if Noah ever regretted cursing Ham. What we do know is that the story is remembered as Noah's Ark or Noah and the Great Flood, not Noah the angry drunk. A moment of weakness doesn't define a life. It didn't define Noah's nor does it define our own.

Finally, and this connects to character being necessary as well as opening doors for others, Godly character that is given responsibility is also Godliness with the responsibility to pass on faithfulness. I don't think it's a stretch to speculate that God's intention for Noah repopulating the earth wasn't just multiplication. It was also that Noah instill faithfulness in his family and their offspring. The hope was that humanity wouldn't repeat the sins of the past.

Being used of God isn't for the faint of heart. It lies far beyond personal salvation. There is the ripple effect on the lives around us, the humility to admit and bounce back from our mistakes, and the responsibility to bring others onto a road that pursues God and faithfulness. We are called to lead people to Jesus. Not the Jesus of American culture or wrapped in any flag of any nation. The Jesus of the gospels.

As this happens sin works its way out of the world because it is replaced with a burning desire to know and live into the image of God revealed in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit.

The question before each of us in our lives is "to whom am I to be a Noah?" Who is God calling me to be an example of Christ before, and what is God working in me to make my example more and more into the genuine image of Jesus?