

First Sunday Lent 2018 By Pastor Thomas Drobena

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Every culture has a Flood story—which is good indication for even the strongest skeptics of the Bible that something happened far enough back for all of us to remember it.

The broad strokes are ever the same. Humanity's wickedness becomes a threat to the world, to the very order of the cosmos. And so the powers that be smite us, wash us away in a Flood greater than any natural catastrophe, in order to prevent us from doing yet more harm to the world. There are, however, survivors—obviously—who are borne atop the waters in a great ship, an Ark, that preserves both human and animal life. Thus is civilization, and the whole of Creation, given new life, new birth, a second chance.

Everyone tells this story, every human society. We read it to our children and paint it on the walls of our Sunday School classrooms. We differ in detail, yes, but more fundamentally in interpretation. We all have a Flood.

But there comes a in life time when this story makes us uncomfortable. There comes a time when we look beyond the bulkhead and wonder, What about everybody else? Did God really wipe out the world? Is His wrath so great and terrible? And if so, then the Ark ceases to be for us a sign of hope, of wonder, of promise, and becomes instead an emblem of destruction, of horror. And so we relegate it to the status of a children's story, a fairy tale, so that we don't have to think about it. We don't have to take it seriously.

Look at the animals, kids! Ignore whatever's floating in the water.

The story of the Flood and of Noah's Ark is not important for what it teaches us about psychology, geology, or history. It's important for what it teaches us about God.

So let's recap. According to the Bible, God made the world good. There was no wickedness in it, no violence as we think of it. Human beings as moral agents did what was right. It was our purpose, our blessing, to care for the world and for all that God has made. We were gardeners, farmers, caretakers, sub-creators, agents of the living God. Human beings were the

bridge, the lynchpin, between the spiritual and the material. We were the capstone of Creation, the kings and priests who served Creation by leading all creatures in proper praise and love of God.

But we screwed up. We didn't want to serve, though such service was our freedom, the source of all our life. Unlike the birds and the beasts, humans possessed free will. That means that we were, and remain, moral agents, able to judge good and evil, able to discern between the way the world is and the way it ought to be. If a dog is bad, it's not the dog's fault. All he has is instinct, experience, and training. A bad dog is the result of a bad master. Not so with us. We have free will. We have responsibility and culpability. When we screw up, whatever the extenuating circumstances, it's our own fault. And it was our fault that broke the world.

Once we rejected God, in hopes of becoming our own gods, the whole system began to spin out of control. The center cannot hold. We got worse and worse and worse. Our wickedness was pervasive and infectious, corrupting both the physical and the spiritual. The whole of Creation groaned from the sins that we poured out as innocent blood upon the earth.

And according to the Bible—this is straight out of Genesis—things got to the point at which “every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.” Think about that for a minute. Our every thought was only evil all the time. And it grieved God that we committed such atrocities. This was not what He intended, not for us and certainly not for the good of all Creation. We had become a cancer upon the healthy body of the world.

And just to be clear, God could have given up. He could have started over with literally no effort whatsoever. He had spoken the world and all things into existence with but a Word. It would be no difficulty at all to simply speak us back out of existence, making it so that we never were nor would ever be. Then He could've started afresh with new worlds called forth from nothing and made good.

But it is not the nature of God to give up, to abandon. Rather, it is the nature of God to love, no matter how difficult or onerous that might be, no matter the price that loving us might ultimately demand.

And so humanity was saved, through Noah, through the one family not completely and utterly corrupted by sin, the one family still maintaining a

spark of hope for what humanity was truly meant to be. And this Flood was in fact an act not of wrath but of mercy, a cleansing and a washing, a second birth for Creation, liberating man from his madness and the world from man gone mad.

But I want to be clear. It's not just mercy for Noah. It's not just mercy for the animals. The Flood was mercy for the dead. Humanity was absolutely, utterly corrupted. Our every thought was only evil all the time. We were like a zombie horde, except that zombies don't have a choice. We chose our slavery to sin. We chose to be a plague upon the world.

Yet God would not abandon us. God would not give up on us. 100% pure evil, and still He loves us! Even death, even the collapse of civilization, cannot separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ! And do you know how we know this?

Just look to the words of St Peter this morning. Look to them and see if they don't blow our collective minds:

He [Jesus] was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, in which also He went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the Ark, in which a few, that is eight persons, were saved through water. And Baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you.

In other words, when Jesus died on the Cross—when we murdered God in the flesh—the Spirit and soul of Jesus Christ descended to the dead, down into Hades, down into hell, where He preached the Good News to the dead, to the spirits in prison from the time of Noah, who did not obey! Mankind murdered God, and in response God descended into the very depths of hell to bring life and liberation to the very worst of the worst, the souls drowned in the Flood, the utterly corrupted, whose only thoughts were only evil all the time!

These are the people for whom Christ died! These are the unforgivable whom He now forgives! What happened to all those damned who drowned so justly in the Flood? Jesus saved them! Jesus loved them all the way to hell and back!

And that's how much He loves you. Because Baptism is not the Ark. Baptism is the Flood. It is death and resurrection for every sinful soul, drowning to our wickedness to rise again in Christ. And no matter how twisted, no matter how evil, no matter if you've pulled the whole world down with you in your sin, Christ has come for you, come to die for love of you. And nothing, nothing—not even the very gates of hell—can hold back the Flood of mercy poured forth from the side of the living God.