

**Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Second Sunday after Trinity**

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the sixth Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.ⁱⁱ

“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

“... And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

“Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons’ wives with thee. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them. Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-second Verse of the twenty-fourth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.ⁱⁱⁱ

“... Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

The Bible often talks about God as if He had human body parts. His eyes behold the nations. His ears are open to prayers. He tramples nations under His feet. He stretches out His hand. His strong right arm delivers His people.

Everyone knows that these anthropomorphisms cannot be taken literally. They are symbolic ways and poetic ways of speaking. Except in the person of Jesus, God does not have human body parts. But if we were to give up these anthropomorphic expressions, we would have a hard time talking about God.

The same is true of the emotions that are often ascribed to God – His anger, His jealousy, His delight, His compassion. God does not have emotions.

So when we come across the expression in this morning’s lesson that God repented of creating humans, we have to be careful. Repentance for us means being sorry, having regrets about something we have done, asking forgiveness, and trying to avoid doing the same thing again.

But for God repentance simply means going in a different direction. In this morning's lesson it means starting over without any of the emotional overtones that the word has for us. God does not regret anything He has done. He does not feel guilty, and He does not seek forgiveness. He simply decides to start over.

The Hebrew word for "man" in the generic sense, is "*adam*". But God is not going to start over by creating Adam all over again. He is going to go in a different direction. This time He is going to work with a man He considers to be the best of the human race.

He goes back to the beginning when the earth was a watery chaos and He separated the waters above from the waters below and gathered the waters below into restricted areas so that dry land could emerge. That's what happens in the story of the great flood. God begins a new creation, and the first thing He does is destroy the old one. But He preserves a remnant – one man and his family and a mating pair of every animal.

Destroying the old to make room for the new is a theme that recurs again with the story of the defeat and exile of Israel and the destruction of the temple. God sent His chosen people into exile from the promised land into which He had once led them, but again He preserved a faithful remnant from which to begin anew.

God never gives up. He destroys the old so that the new can emerge.

The same theme is taken up in the New Testament. St. Paul says, "That which is sown is not quickened except it die." Jesus says, "except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God." St. John the Divine says in his vision, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."

Always the goal is the same. God intends to restore the great Sabbath, the day on which He rested because the creation was perfect, and He is willing to clear the way for the perfect by destroying the imperfect.

The great Sabbath is foreshadowed in the flood story in at least two ways. First, there is the name "Noah" which means "rest." Second there is the great peace when all the animals live together in harmony, as Isaiah also foretold in his great vision of the wolf dwelling with the lamb and the calf lying down with the lion, and the carnivores eating straw instead of preying on other animals. St. Paul reflects

that vision when he talks about the whole creation waiting and crying out for that day to come.

And come it will, but not until God has repented and started over again and again.

In the original creation, God started with Adam, the man of dust. In the flood, he started over with Noah, a man of righteousness. When that didn't achieve what He wanted, God took a different direction with the calling out of Abraham, a man of faith whose obedience was tested and proven. From Abraham God created a great nation to advance the cause of the great Sabbath.

Each time God took a different direction there was progress, but each time there was rebellion and disobedience. Finally, God sent His Son to assume human nature and bring about the fulfillment of the Great Sabbath, which Jesus called "the kingdom of God."

That vision has still not been fulfilled even in our day, but definitive progress has been made. Jesus has conquered death and has become for us an ark in which we can survive the final judgment of God.

Make no mistake. The flood is the judgment of God on the human race, just as the exile and the destruction of the temple is the judgment of God on the Jews. But the wood of the cross is the wood of the ark in which all who take shelter are saved from ultimate destruction and carried in safety to the new heaven and the new earth, the land of peace and rest.

God can be seen throughout the Bible as the God of new beginnings. He is willing to start over again and again. He is willing to start over with you. Whatever you may have done in the past, whatever direction you have taken in your life, God is willing for you to be born again, to start over, to repent and to go in a different direction.

Jesus says in the New Testament Lesson for today that the great flood caught everyone by surprise because they were so pre-occupied with the affairs of the world that they failed to read the signs of the times and did not even notice the ark that had been built or to wonder about it. Don't let that happen to you.

Don't get so attached to family or friends or possessions or career that you lose sight of the ultimate end of all things, including your own life.

Don't just cling to your old ways and your old loyalties. Another great judgment is coming to destroy the world as we know it and open the way for the Kingdom of God. Seek refuge in the ark, the cross of Christ. Ask God to destroy all that is imperfect in you and make you over into a new person, fit for the Great Sabbath. God repents and begins again. So should you.

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ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).*

ⁱⁱ *Genesis 6: 5-8, 13-22 (KJV).*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St. Matthew 24: 32-42 (KJV).*