

God makes a covenant. Sermon on 20th Sunday after Trinity

Genesis 8, 18-22 and 9, 12-17



18 So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. **19** All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another. **20** Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. **21** The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. **22** "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." 17 So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

Noah's Ark has always been an inspiration to people of all cultures. Even today, the story of Noah's rescue remains one of the most popular children's stories in the Bible. However, I wonder what living like in that Ark was really like. Probably also quite unbearable. Just imagine the smell of that container made of wood and pitch! And then there was the constant bleating and roaring of the animals. And even kind people like Noah and his family must have gotten pretty annoyed with each other in that cramped space after a while. When the first signs of new life were visible outside, the agony was far from over. How the whole ark must have been humming. The animals pawed the ground. The birds chirped with excitement, and the children must have been constantly asking, "How long? How much further?" "When will we finally get there?" And yet Captain Noah kept his pose. With a firm expression and a confident gaze, he remained unfazed. God hadn't yet spoken. Noah in the ark is a picture of our lives. Today we are, floating like a leaf in the tumult of world events. Some of what we see out there can drive us to despair. Sometimes even our own lives are like Noah's stinking ark, in which we are trapped. And for many of us, everyday life is unbearable. It makes us want to cry out to heaven. Isn't

there something else? Some people really want to break out of the box. And yet we mustn't attempt anything without God. I mean, we can learn from Captain Noah. He was in the ark for almost a year. Even after the Flood, God hadn't contacted them again. What would happen next? Humans and animals were at their limits. Had God forgotten them after all? Nevertheless, Noah remained calm. He knew that all life in the ark was in God's hands. When the "yes" finally came, God did so with solemn and clear statements. Noah was supposed to leave the ark with his families and animals, each according to its own kind, just as God had described. Even when it was all over and everyone had safely landed on land, Noah still didn't let down. He didn't, as some might surely do, light the barbecue and order champagne from the fridge. No, first and foremost, before he had even built a hut over his head, he built an altar to God in thanksgiving. Noah's story is impressive because Noah lives with such firm trust in God. Noah and his entire family came very close to a total catastrophe. Even after a year, it must have been deeply ingrained how suddenly and cruelly life can end. After the miraculous preservation in the ark, his whole life and every single day of his life was a great miracle! A great miracle that one could take from God's hand. And that felt good! Even in the ark! Life only becomes bad when we humans separate ourselves from God. If we view our life here on earth merely as a kind of natural law, everyday life becomes torture! The constant repetition of day and night, summer and winter, work and vacation, weighs us down. Even if we have everything we need in life, we feel, like Noah's family in the ark, abandoned by God. Our life is a narrow box from which we can no longer find an exit or entry. And if we try to break out of the rhythm, it only gets worse. We would do well to look to Noah and learn from him. His gaze from the wooden box is directed entirely towards God. And when he is allowed to leave the ark with his family, his gaze still remains firmly fixed on God. And what a happy scene the Bible shows us there: God himself shares in the joy of the people. He even seals their joy with a visible seal and stretches a rainbow over the entire world so that people can know that God holds his preserving and blessing hand over everything... But even in this happy scene there is a dark shadow, and that is that the past is still entirely present in this scene. Shortly before the flood, God had seen the evil intentions of the people. This wickedness was so great that it reached a limit and had to send the great flood upon the world. Now, after everything was over... And after God had removed all the wicked from the world... As God stood blessing Noah's family, these words came again...

„For... the thoughts and intents of the human heart are evil from childhood.“

Only this time, the outcome was completely different. God would no longer destroy the world!

This "For" must be the most sinister "For" in the entire Bible. The "For" that had previously led to the destruction of humanity would now lead to its preservation. What a miracle! For humanity had not improved even after Noah. God could also diagnose in Noah's pious family that wickedness had still not been removed from the world. The rebellion of humanity that had begun with Adam and Eve would continue even after the Flood. And yet God would not curse, but bless! Not strike back, but protect! Despite everything, he would hold his hand of blessing over us humans. In a truly astonishing way, and one we can hardly comprehend, God hereby breaks the iron chains that bind guilt and punishment. Guilt normally leads to punishment. And wrongdoing leads to retribution. That was the law! Previously, creation and life depended on how people behaved. After the Flood, God himself breaks this connection. God would still love people... still protect them... still be there for them. And it is precisely this connection that all religions have overlooked. In all religions, the story of Noah is understood as a

story of punishment and salvation. We humans are meant to be warned by the story of Noah. If we don't behave, the same thing will happen to us as happened to the people in Noah's time. Only the biblical story reads quite differently. Here, God makes the clear finding that the wickedness of humanity is at its root. Wickedness cannot be eradicated from the world, not even with the Flood. And God decides against all religions. He decides from the heart of his love. "People should still live!"

Now the burning question is what kind of future do we have with this God who chooses us so unconditionally? And above all, the question also applies the other way around: What kind of future can God expect with us humans? Would God now have to forever resign himself to the fact that we humans despise God and are not interested in him? We might perhaps consider the situation without God perfectly normal. We have now become so accustomed to living without God that we don't even think about God as we go about our daily lives, even as he blesses and protects us in so many different ways. But God is definitely not resigned to this. God wants more than just a rainbow over the world. He wants more than just an interim solution. God wants our whole, undivided hearts! Just as He Himself is undivided and perfect, He wants our hearts to look undividedly to Him. What Noah did back then, when he listened to God's word and looked to God, was only a small preview of this undivided devotion of humanity to God. Even the sacrifice that Noah prepared for God immediately after leaving the ark is only a prelude to what is to come. God would not bring another flood. But he would save a second time. And he would begin a new humanity a second time. Just as Noah walked out of the dark ark, so Jesus Christ later emerged from the dark grave of death, Satan, and hell. And after Jesus Christ followed his church. Just as orderly and just as planned as the animals from the ark. All who believe in Jesus Christ and are baptized will be saved. And before the ark a sacrifice burns. This time not the sacrifice of an animal, but the pure sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. From this sacrifice, a pure, unclouded fellowship of humanity with God will finally grow. Everything that happens in our world reminds us of the wickedness of humanity. But do you also see God's preserving hand? He sustains everything for so long and with such patience because he wants to make even more room in his ark, the Church. He wants even more children to be saved. Amen