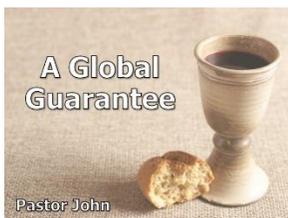


"A Global Guarantee"

February 18, 2017

Genesis 9: 8-17 -

*<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup> "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." <sup>12</sup> God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." <sup>17</sup> God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."*

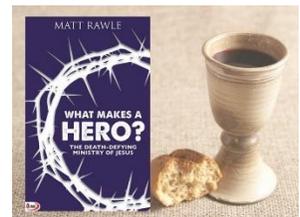


Today's passage takes place in the aftermath of a great flood. Perhaps some of you here today remember the 1972 flood in Rapid City. In our collective memory, this is probably the most devastating, personal experience any of us has with flooding. We have all watched news coverage and seen pictures of other big floods – New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Japan after the tsunami, and images of the flooding in

Puerto Rico are more recent catastrophes that come to mind. These are all examples of floods that occur relatively quickly and violently. But the flood that came in the Genesis account was a flood long in the making, slowly but steadily building its destructive force. Other similar floods occur. Heavy seasonal rains build up the available surface water and slowly the water spills out over the land. And just as slowly it recedes, leaving behind a rich, fertile soil. In some cases, there is loss of property and even of life. In other cases, the water comes and goes a natural part of the cycles and rhythms of nature.

We are currently in the midst of a global flood. Did you know that? In 2002, a huge piece of Antarctica broke off and floated away. As this piece of ice that was the size of Connecticut melts, it will slowly but surely raise the level of the ocean. Since then, many other pieces have broken off and have begun to melt. As our planet warms and the ice caps continue to be reduced, a time will come when islands and coastal cities will be threatened. But that seems so distant to us, doesn't it? It feels like it will never affect those of us living here in South Dakota. We feel distanced from these global realities. Many in Noah's day also felt distanced from the impending doom. What lay ahead was bad.

In contrast, in our Lenten small group study, What Makes a Hero, author Matt Rawle wrestles with the idea of what is "good". He argues that only God is good and to back up his thinking, he asks us to think about creation. When we think about the creation story, we remember that at end of every day, God said, "It is good". Rawle wonders, what did God see that made Him say this? In the end, he believes that



we must look beyond the orderly and amazing, beyond all the beauty that God had created, to see that “what God does is good”. This is the inherent nature of our God.



But our God, who is good, looked down upon the earth and saw a planet filled with violence and corruption and evil. In response, God said to Noah, *"I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them"*. God would go on to say, *"Make yourself an ark of cypress wood"*. The rains began to fall as Noah went to work. Two by two the animals came (and in some cases, seven of each kind came). Noah, his family, and all the animals entered the ark. The rain continued to fall and the waters rose. Over the course of the next several days, all other humanity was wiped from the face of the earth. Can you imagine what it was like to ride it out in the ark, slowly coming to realize that you and your family and these animals were all that was left? After the rain stopped, the ark just floated along for many days. It would be a hard reality to wrap your mind around, wouldn't it? You were it.

After 150 days, the waters of the great flood began to recede. The ark came to rest on dry ground again. Noah and his family and all the animals disembarked from the ark. Can you imagine what the earth looked like and felt like as they stepped out of the ark for the first time? Think back to those images in your mind from the '72 flood or recall the Hurricane Katrina devastation in New Orleans in 2005 or the more recent destruction that hit Puerto Rico last summer.



To imagine what Noah saw when he stepped out of the ark, take these images, these pictures, and magnify them to the n<sup>th</sup> degree.

The great flood covered the entire earth. All of humanity except Noah and his family were gone. Gone. It is hard to imagine what it looked like. Not only was everything stripped and barren and lifeless, the ground was soggy and grey as far as the eye could see. And they soon came to realize that the entire earth was like this. As Noah and family and God looked upon the earth, a great sadness had to come over them all. What lay ahead must have felt overwhelming.



To put the daunting task of recovering after an epic natural disaster into perspective, a story from one of my children's lives. As a freshman in high school, my oldest son Matthew went to New Orleans on a mission trip to help in the recovery efforts after Hurricane Katrina. It had already been three years since the hurricane and the ensuing flooding, but there was still plenty of work to be done. Matthew spent a week with his team in a temporarily abandoned house, tearing out moldy sheetrock and insulation. Another crew would come in to kill off the mold. And another crew would come in to rewire and replumb the home. And another crew would come in, and another crew would come in, and another crew would come in. Six years later, as a student at Dakota Wesleyan University, Matthew returned to New Orleans on another mission trip. His shocked comment about what he found in New Orleans was, "It still looks the same". He personally witnessed that flood recovery takes a long, long time.

To Matthew, on the surface level, it looked as if nothing had happened in the six years that he had been away.



We know that God had come to the point of being sad enough with the state of humanity that He felt the need to destroy them. Yet I have to believe that God was also deeply

saddened afterward when He looked out on the destruction that the flood had caused. We can hear this in God's words when He says to Noah, *"I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth"*. This promise was given not only to Noah and his family, but to all of the living creatures as well. As I think about this sadness, I also think there may have been a little regret as well. Did it have to come to this? Was destroying the earth the only option? We see later, in the New Testament, that there is another solution to the sin and violence and evil of the world. But that covenant will have to wait a few weeks. The solution will be love.

As a reminder of His promise to never again destroy the earth – both to Himself and to humanity – God places a rainbow in the sky. The rainbow is, of course, a form of light. In our Lenten study and throughout the Bible, we see that light represents God and that light represents good. The rainbow in the sky symbolizes the covenant that God established with Noah and all descendants thereafter. Never again shall God destroy the earth. This is a covenant promise that remains with us today. As an extension of this promise, from this point



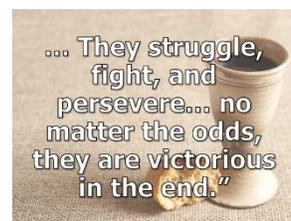
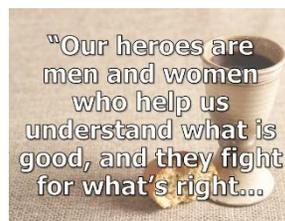
forward, God always has the best interests of mankind at heart. It is a turning point in our relationship with God.



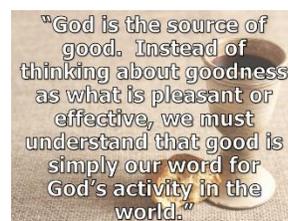
The covenant with Noah is the first of God's big agreements with mankind. When we think of the covenants that God establishes, we usually think of the covenant established through Moses with the Ten Commandments or of the covenant with Abraham and Sarah to make Israel into a great nation. In today's passage, this first covenant is established with all of mankind, with all the creatures of the earth, and with the earth itself. In this sense, it is the biggest of the covenants. This covenant, like all the other covenants that we will touch upon in this series, is rooted in God's love and in God's goodness. Ultimately God's love will be what forever redeems mankind to God.

In this covenant promise, God pledged to never again destroy the earth and all that inhabits the earth. Because it is a covenant, there are no conditions. God pledges to keep His promise no matter what we do or do not do. God's faith in keeping the covenant has nothing to do with us. When we look at the covenant from the other side, can we keep the promise never to destroy again? Our world remains full of violence and corruption and evil. And even we ourselves, at times, treat others in ways that destroy their self-worth and their value. In other situations, we often put ourselves or our needs far ahead of others and their needs. And sometimes we even trample right over others in an attempt to get our way, to push through our agenda, to make ourselves appear right.

In our Lenten study, What Makes a Hero, author Matt Rawle points out the contrast we find with our superheroes. He notes that our comic book heroes always work for the good, for what is right. He writes, "Our heroes are the men and women who help us understand what is good, and they fight for what's right... They struggle, fight, and persevere... no matter the odds, they are victorious in the end". Think Superman, Batman, and so on.



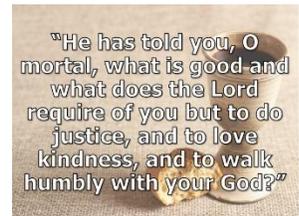
In chapter one of his book, Rawle then transitions to our real hero, Jesus Christ, using Ephesians 5, verses 1 and 2, as his text. In Ephesians 5: 1-2, we read, "*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*". Paul urges us to imitate God's works by imitating what Jesus has done. Rawle writes, "In this way, Jesus takes on the role of hero for us, and we seek to imitate his behavior because he is the supreme example of goodness and love". Ultimately, through faith, we come to realize that the source of that goodness is God. He goes on to write, "God is the source of good. Instead of thinking about goodness as what is pleasant or effective, we must understand that good is simply our word for God's activity in the world". That activity was lived out by Jesus Christ. He is our model to follow as we seek to live out God's love in our world. Just as in the end our superheroes are victorious, so too was our real hero, Jesus, victorious. It is through His victory over sin and death, as a "*fragrant offering*" on our behalf, that we claim life eternal. Thanks be to God.





We remember that, in the beginning, God created all and said, "It is good". As the Genesis 1 story continues to unfold, God creates man in His image and assigns mankind the responsibility to steward the earth, to care for the earth. He gave us dominion over the creatures of the earth, over the plants and the trees, the birds and the fish, over everything that has the breath of life. God also gave us the power to choose to love one another or to hate one another. As stewards of God's creation, we must choose to love and care for one another because we are all a part of the creation. Our roles as followers of Jesus is to live our lives as good in the world, so that all parts of creation can live fully into this covenant promise, into this global guarantee, that God made after the flood.

We gain some insights into how we are to live as good stewards from our What Makes a Hero study. For author Matt Rawle and for myself, the key to living as good in the world is found in Micah 6:8. This verse reads, *"He has told you, O mortal, what is good and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God"*? If we are to live as good in the world, we must ask ourselves how we live this Biblical truth out. Rawle shares that first, we must seek to do justice. To begin, he suggests that we ask questions such as "Why are people hungry? Why does poverty exist?" Once we begin to understand the answers to these questions, he suggests that we move forward to offer justice and then works of kindness and mercy. We do this by feeding someone, by visiting someone, by helping out a neighbor. Rawle writes that acts of kindness and mercy "go hand in hand with justice – asking why they are hungry." The third step then is to walk humbly



with our God. In walking humbly with our God, we are called to “seek forgiveness, to turn toward God, and to fall in love with God”. Rawle tells us, “do this and God’s promise will be yours”.



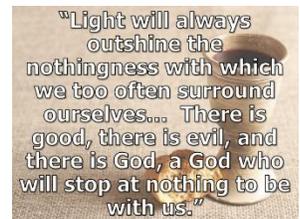
God’s ultimate promise to us is that “it’s not that good wins in the end; rather in the end, there is God. The good news is that God invites us into eternal relationship through Christ

empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is one of the ways which Jesus redefines what it means to be a hero”. When we live as good in the world, we model our hero, Jesus. In doing so, we bring light into our lives and into the darkness of the world. Rawle concludes chapter one with these words of

encouragement for our faith journey: “Light will always outshine the nothingness with which we too often surround ourselves. Our connection with Christ is the “something” that

“nothing” can never take away. There is good, there is evil, and there is God, a God who will stop at nothing to be with us”. God will stop at nothing to be with us. That is our covenant promise, our global guarantee. Thanks be to God.

Amen.



### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) How can you become a better steward of what God has given you?
- 2) Where could your light outshine some darkness? Pray for God’s guidance and presence to help you shine this week!
- 3) What act of mercy or kindness could you offer this week to one in need?