

I went back to school this week. I pulled out all of my Old Testament text books along with different translations of the Bible and poured through Chapters 5 & 6 of Genesis. It has been 19.5 years since I studied it with Dr. Walls. I even pulled out one of Josh's textbooks. I read and thought. As I moved my way through Chapter 5, I mapped out the family tree from Adam to Noah because I knew that I needed to see the information in a different way – more than just names. I pulled old notes so that I could remember how big a cubit was to begin to wrap my head around the building of the ark. I did this all in preparation for preaching on Genesis. Today we begin a 4 week series on Noah, and then 4 weeks on Abraham and Sarah followed by 6 weeks on Isaac, Jacob & Esau, & their descendants. I found that I learned so much that I could not contain it all in the scriptures. I had been thinking through ways in which we can use this time to grow in our faith and after several hours on Wednesday morning I wrote the first session of a Bible Study that will go with us throughout the summer. It is not as dynamic as if we were all together around the table but it is a place to start. There is a Facebook Group for discussion but that is not the only way to participate. All the information is on the website as well as printed copies available. Even if you do not have a group you can read along and answer the questions. I tried to write it so people of all ages could participate together. If there are questions that arise that you do not know the answer – give me a call/text or email. If you don't connect with the Bible Study there will still be plenty for you on Sunday morning. I just won't be going as deep.

We will be looking at the whole stories for our ancestors in faith. We will cover parts that do not make it in the lectionary or because of the way the calendar works only comes up every 6 years instead of 3. But a little introduction before we get there.

A couple of things to remember about the Old Testament and the book of Genesis specifically. Unlike the New Testament, where people who lived the story wrote it down, it was passed down orally. The priests, scribes, and

theologians were not news reporters but takes the shape and emphasis of their reality the Israelite monarchy (9th – 10th centuries) and the Babylonian exile (6th century) along with the family stories to comprise the book. We do not have documents that identify specific times, places or locations that allows us to pinpoint our history. These stories tell us more about God rather than a specific history. Many an argument has been had about creation and if the 7 days that were listed were 7 days like we know it or 7 days as God experiences it.

So what does the Genesis chapters 5 & 6 tell us about God? That God waited a long time for people to walk with him. In chapter 5 we go approximately 622 years before there is a note that someone walked with God. That was Enoch. He was a descendent from Seth, Adam & Eve's third son. He was the 5th generation and none of the ones before connected with God. For his first 65 years Enoch was just a man but then his son was born and verse 22 records that "Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah 300 years."

I know that my life changed when I had our first child. In some ways I felt closer to God and in others further away. I felt that I had no time to do anything but keep this tiny human alive. And yet, the love I had for the tiny human helped to shape my understanding of the love God had for me and for us. We do not know Enoch's story other than a couple of verses but we know that Enoch was the first man not to die – vs. 24 simply says he "walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him."

We go 3 more generations before we get to Noah. His father, Lamech said, "out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief form our work and from the toil of our hands." God cursed the ground as a consequence of Adam eating from the forbidden fruit. He further cursed the ground after Cain murdered his brother Abel. We also know from looking at Cain's family tree that he descendant Lamech was cut from the same cloth. He tells his wives that "he killed a man for wounding me,

and a young man for striking me” (Genesis 4:23). As we continue to read into chapter 6 we hear from God how evil humanity had become. And this is the scene in which we Noah’s story truly begins.

Genesis 6:6 says God is sorry that he had made humankind on the earth. It doesn’t feel that it had been that long. The chapters before that were just about Cain & Abel, which were Adam’s sons. This is why the genealogy is so important. We get not just the names of those between Adam & Noah but we get the amount of time had passed. It’s 10 generations from Adam to Noah. We usually have 3 – 4 generations alive at once depending on a lot of factors. On Josh’s side of the family there are 4 from his grandfather through our children. On mine there are 3. We may have a few families with more than that. We also get that each person in the genealogy lived much longer than we do. In 6:3 God says that we can now expect a life span of 120 years.

We all have a black sheep in our family – someone we that may be difficult but what God is telling us is that only 2 men walked with God. We also do not know what God means to walk with God. We can use our knowledge and writings from beyond Genesis but we really don’t know. So this is the setting of Noah’s life.

When I set out to preach this series, I planned the “Who Am I” to be about Noah so that we could look at his whole story, which we will, but we began this morning with the reminder that the texts tells us more about God than it does about specific history. So what does chapters 5 & 6 tell us about God? God is exceedingly patient. 10 generations have gone by with 2 people who walked with God. It also tells us that God is loving because even in the face of all the wickedness, sin & evil “that Noah found favor in God’s sight, along with all of the animals, creeping things and birds of the air.”

I think this is especially important for us to hear today. It is in our nature to make generalizations but that fails us. In the context of the needing to address centuries of racial disparity it becomes easy for us to push back and find exception. I read it all week – We think that when we read or hear the statement Black Lives Matter that it means that other lives do not. I often see the push back that All Lives Matter or Blue Lives Matter. It is not an either or scenario. The issue is that some lives are not deemed as valuable. The issue is that some lives are seen as threatening. President Bush on Tuesday released a profound statement:

“Laura and I are anguished by the brutal suffocation of George Floyd and disturbed by the injustice and fear that suffocate our country. Yet we have resisted the urge to speak out, because this is not the time for us to lecture. It is time for us to listen. It is time for America to examine our tragic failures – and as we do, we will also see some of our redeeming strengths.

It remains a shocking failure that many African Americans, especially young African American men, are harassed and threatened in their own country. It is a strength when protesters, protected by responsible law enforcement, march for a better future. This tragedy – in a long series of similar tragedies – raises a long overdue question: How do we end systemic racism in our society? The only way to see ourselves in a true light is to listen to the voices of so many who are hurting and grieving. Those who set out to silence those voices do not understand the meaning of America – or how it becomes a better place.

America’s greatest challenge has long been to unite people of very different backgrounds into a single nation of justice and opportunity. The doctrine and habits of racial superiority, which once nearly split our country, still threaten our Union. The answers to American problems

are found by living up to American ideals — to the fundamental truth that all human beings are created equal and endowed by God with certain rights. We have often underestimated how radical that quest really is, and how our cherished principles challenge systems of intended or assumed injustice. The heroes of America — from Frederick Douglass, to Harriet Tubman, to Abraham Lincoln, to Martin Luther King, Jr. — are heroes of unity. Their calling has never been for the fainthearted. They often revealed the nation's disturbing bigotry and exploitation — stains on our character sometimes difficult for the American majority to examine. We can only see the reality of America's need by seeing it through the eyes of the threatened, oppressed, and disenfranchised.

That is exactly where we now stand. Many doubt the justice of our country, and with good reason. Black people see the repeated violation of their rights without an urgent and adequate response from American institutions. We know that lasting justice will only come by peaceful means. Looting is not liberation, and destruction is not progress. But we also know that lasting peace in our communities requires truly equal justice. The rule of law ultimately depends on the fairness and legitimacy of the legal system. And achieving justice for all is the duty of all.

This will require a consistent, courageous, and creative effort. We serve our neighbors best when we try to understand their experience. We love our neighbors as ourselves when we treat them as equals, in both protection and compassion. There is a better way — the way of empathy, and shared commitment, and bold action, and a peace rooted in justice. I am confident that together, Americans will choose the better way.

As I read his statement, over and over I was reminded of God's love for us all. The story, not just in Genesis but the entire Bible is the story of God who will continually try to get us to trust in his ways, his truth and his life. When the world was too much he chose to start over – not completely from scratch.

May this time be the time when we choose God's way, to hold what is good and let go of what is harmful. May be like Noah who trusted to build the ark. In the name of Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.