

21 February 2024
Lent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“40 for Life - Noah: Cleansed for Life”

Text: Genesis 6:11-22; 7:11-12; 8:1-4, 13, 20-22; Titus 3:1-8

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

40 days and 40 nights. For 40 days and 40 nights the ***rains fell upon the earth***. For 40 days and 40 nights ***all the fountains of the great deep burst forth***. For 40 days and 40 nights ***the windows of the heavens were opened***. And the earth as Noah knew it, was no more. In 40 days and 40 nights, God brought to an end ***all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven***.

This was no small thing. No cutesy children’s book story of a floating zoo. This was a cleansing. ***The earth was filled with violence. The earth was corrupt; all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth***. And it could not go on.

So what had taken God 6 days to create, He destroyed in 40. A creation once with no violence had become ***filled with violence***. A creation once without corruption or death had become completely corrupted and subject to death. The sin of Adam and Eve had metastasized into every part of creation. But in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the fourth month, on the first day of the month, it was all gone.

40 days of death so that there could be new life.

This is the first mention of the number 40 in the Scriptures. It didn’t have to be 40. The God who created all things in 6 days could have ended them just as fast, or faster. But 40 days He chose. And the number 40 will become a significant number in the Scriptures. 40 will be a journeying number, a passage number, from death to life. That’s why the church chose 40 days for this Lenten season, this season of the death of Jesus to the life of Easter.

40 days is a long time for us. If you’re like me, it’s hard to keep up your Lenten discipline for 40 days. It sounds not that long. It sounds like we should be able. Yet how often I fail; can’t quite make it all those days. Because like the earth in Noah’s day, the sin of Adam and Eve has metastasized in me, too. Into my mind, my will, and my heart. Corrupting all my thoughts, words, deeds, and desires. Try as I might to keep it out. ***I am the one who needs cleansing***.

But if 40 days is a long time for us, imagine how long those days were for Noah! As he

listened to the rain pelting down, as he heard the roar of the waters coming from the great deep. Perhaps such noise was good, drowning out the cries of the people . . . Cries that had no doubt mocked him before for building a boat where there was no water, that had now become cries of distress and pleas for saving.

But Noah and his family were safe in the ark. Not because they were better, but because they were righteous. Because Noah and his family had also cried out in distress and with pleas for saving, and by such repentance and faith had received the righteousness of God in the forgiveness of their sins. That is what it means to be righteous in the Scriptures. It is not a righteousness that comes from us or that we can achieve. It is the righteousness that comes from above, the gift of God. The sin of Adam and Eve had corrupted Noah and his family as well, but they were saved *by grace through faith*.

So at the end of those 40 days and 40 nights, **God remembered Noah** and his family. Not that He forgotten them and suddenly remembered! No, it means that He acted for them. Having cleansed the world with the waters of the flood, He now began new life for the world. So how appropriate that when Noah came out of the ark, the first thing he did was **build an altar** and **offered burnt offerings**. And **the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma - the aroma of faith**. Faith that makes one righteous. Faith that God would remember an even greater promise - the one He had made to Adam and Eve to send a Saviour. **To provide the cleansing from sin even greater than the great flood.**

And in the fullness of time, God remembered that promise, too. And sent His Son. And upon Jesus on the cross was all the wrath against all the sin, violence, and corruption of all the world poured out. And just as at the time of Noah, there was mocking. And just as at the time of Noah, there was a cry for saving. And just as at the time of Noah, there was death. Death for the life and cleansing of the world, by the blood of God's sacrifice, God's burnt offering. To give life to the world.

So now for us it is through another flood, the saving flood of **Baptism**, that we are saved. By Baptism we are placed into the ark of the Church to be kept safe through the storm and trials of life. For as we heard from Paul's letter to Titus tonight, ***we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another***. Or in other words, we were like the people outside the ark in the days of Noah! ***But! when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared***, - when God remembered and acted for us - ***he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness***, - not because we're good or better than anyone else - ***but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace*** - like Noah, cleansed, justified, made righteous, *by grace through faith* - ***we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life***. The hope of a new life that will be eternal.

Now, we are still in the ark; the ark of the Church. The cleansing water of God's *new* flood now cleansing one sinner at a time, as in Baptism we are drowned and die with Jesus, that we may also rise with Him to a new life. It is ***the washing of regeneration***, the washing of ***renewal***. We are the ones who now cry out to God in repentance and faith, and receive His righteousness. So that one day, when God remembers His promise - His promise to come again in glory for His Bride, the Church - the door not of the ark but of heaven will be opened, and we will enter into the new life of a new heavens and a new earth.

So are we cleansed for life. The cleansing begun in Noah's day brought to completion by Jesus in our day. That dying to sin and rising to life, we live a new and righteous life. Which is what these 40 days of Lent are all about.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.