

Noah's Choice with God - And Ours
Scripture Lessons: Matthew 7:21-29, Genesis 6:9-22

The heart of the way that Presbyterians have always looked at text is simply this: *The truth of the text is the truth from the text.* We don't go to the text and decide if it is true. We don't decide what we think is true and then go looking for a text that proves it. When we do that, the source of the truth is not **from** the text, but our ideas - or more honestly, our desires. After all, if we come to the text wanting to prove something, it usually has something to do with supporting the way we want to live, or keep living.

Why have Presbyterians always been so careful about text? ...because from Calvin on, we have this very healthy idea that we are not so healthy spiritually. Calvin said we are "totally depraved." Now, he did not mean by that that we are all completely wrong about everything. What he meant is that none of us are ever completely right about anything. We always live somewhere in between right and wrong. And the problem does not have much to do with our brains and knowledge. It has to do with our loves and our desires. What we want shapes what we think is right more than what we think shapes what we want. Augustine had said a long time before, that "the heart has its reasons that reason cannot know." Calvin just put the bold print on the fact that the heart is usually, well always looking for the wrong reasons. He went to text for this insight. Paul told the Romans that the way the mind gets transformed is we present ourselves as living sacrifices to the one who always got it right because his loves were always in the right direction.

So when we come to a text, we suspend what we already think and take out a clean sheet of paper and ask, "what is the text telling us?" Then we listen to text to hear the truth that comes from it that may strengthen the truths we know, correct the truths we think we know, and maybe even teach us new truths we have never known.

When it comes to the story of Noah and the flood, there has been a lot of hunting for proof of all kinds of our ideas and desires. Looking at text with "...a clean sheet of paper" is the most productive place to start. Let's look fresh, and maybe we will see something new.

"Noah was a righteous man, ...and blameless." He lived in right relationship with God and was true to God in all his relationships with others.

"The earth was corrupt in God's sight, and...filled with violence. All flesh was corrupt in its ways on earth." Do we need to explain that one?

God says the only way to new is that "everything on earth shall die."

...except Noah and his family.

...and two of every living thing, and every kind of food.

God begins a covenant with Noah. If Noah does what God commands, Noah will not be destroyed and will be blessed forever.

“...and Noah did all that God commanded him.”

Now, a lot of the time we think or hear or assume the first part of the text, that God wanted for “everything on the earth to die.” But the text really doesn’t say that. The animals all make it, the plants all make it, and Noah and his family all make it. The point of the text is the promise. There is a covenant in the middle of the mess.

The text is telling us something - something pretty obvious. The evil and violence and corruption is not God’s fault, not the animal’s fault and not the plants fault, and not Noah’s fault. God can’t make things new unless the root cause is washed away, and the results were so bad that the washing needed to be big.

So, God washes the earth of all its corruption and violence and evil and starts over with Noah and all the animals and all the plants.

...and a rainbow appears to remind them of the promise, and Noah offers a worship and sacrifice of thanksgiving for the faithfulness of God.

...and then Noah plants a vineyard, makes wine, gets drunk and it starts all over again.

Isn’t that the way it always seem to work? So, the problem was really simple: Noah did something, and it was not what God commanded. Noah became a little less than he was made to be in his relationship with God and others. Noah became a little-less-than-human.

Jesus says to the followers, “do the will of my Father in heaven” and your house will be built on a rock that withstands the floods the world can bring.

It reminds us of the lesson from Noah, doesn’t it?

God saw the corruption and violence and evil in the whole earth.

But the problem is not out there in the world. It is in the heart of our being less-than-human and more-than-a little-depraved. God sends us the person who is really human, who lives in faithfulness to a faithful God. God makes a new covenant with everyone, and seals it with the one who lives the covenant.

“...but God loved the world so much, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world, but in order that the world would be saved through him.”

God sent a righteous and blameless example to save the world - a complete example, true to God and true to God in all his relationships with others. With Jesus, God gives us a very clear and living picture of being truly human, - living true to God’s love and living God’s love to others. And God says that no matter what happens in the world, the clear example of Jesus is better than a rainbow in the sky. The way of Jesus is the way, and Jesus will win. A new heaven and a new earth will come from God’s rule over all things. God will be faithful until everyone and everything is full of faith in God.

God’s love made flesh is all the truth we need. Now our definitions of truth come from more than text. They come from the living word! They come from body and blood

love that we can see and hear and know and follow! Jesus commands us to love others - not with our own ideas of what love is some vague and confused idea of what love might be. Jesus tells us to do the will of God - to do his love, to love others with his love.

Here's the good news: he tells us that we can do this. We have all the example and the teaching and the instructions and the models that we need. We have body and blood examples of Jesus all around, and we have the Spirit power of his resurrected presence in every moment. We have everything we need from God to live in faith and be faithful. We know in faith we can do this.

The truth from the text in the instructions to followers is like the story of Noah's choice with God. There is a warning to us that is a lot like God's warning to Noah, except that it comes from the one God sent as a clear example: "No everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord, will enter into the place where God is ruler, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

Noah had a choice. Jesus tells the followers they have a choice. We all have a choice. Jesus tells us that we are followers when we do what he commands. So, we have the same choice as Noah: simply to do what God commands, as Jesus says If we build our house on the sand instead of the rock, when the floods come we can't blame the animals - or God. If we build our house on the rock, then we will have everything we need when the storms of the world come.