

Prayer: Spirit of the living God, move through us and among us, open our ears and our hearts to hear and know your word of truth for us this day.

I could make this a really short and to the point sermon and tell you there are four things we learn from the story of Noah and the flood:

1. Don't miss the boat.
2. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.
3. Stay fit. When you're 600 years old,
someone may ask you to do something big.
4. No matter the storm, when you are with God,
there's always a rainbow waiting.

These are all important, but let's take a more in depth look at the scripture.

People may not own a Bible or even read one, but almost everyone has heard of Noah's Ark. There are books about it, paintings, craftwork, movies and even wallpaper.

And why not? What can be wrong with the image of all kinds of living things going into the ark in twosies, twosies!

Well, if you do have a Bible and perchance have read the book of Genesis you will know that the story of Noah does not take place in a picture perfect world nor does it speak fondly or positively about humankind.

Humankind did not turn out the way God intended.

God created and it was good

Then God saw that the 'wickedness of human kind was great and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil' (Gen.6:5)

Something needed to be done – there was a great fracture between the creator and creation.

As Walter Bruggeman says in his commentary on Genesis:

'God has called the world into being to be his faithful covenant partner. He willed unity, harmony, and goodness... But on the other hand, it has not happened that way... it is a recalcitrant creation resistant to the purposes of the very one by whom and for whom the world exists.' (p.74)

And so God set about to make it right. Not because God is some angry tyrant who likes to get his way, but rather because God is a troubled parent who grieves over the alienation of creation.

And so God calls Noah.

Even in the midst of this unruly creation, God finds that there is at least one person who has remained faithful and righteous.

I'm a firm believer that we are all gifted by God in many and varied ways, so when God calls us it's probably because we already have the gifts we need – we may not know we have those gifts but God does.

That's probably because what we think we can accomplish is based on what we think can be done by human strength or knowledge BUT what God calls us to accomplish always seems at least slightly impossible to us.

So Noah, even though he might not have known it, had the leadership gifts and qualities to accomplish what God was asking him to do. And it was no small job! And he was over 500 years old and it was probably going to take him a hundred years to build the ark according to God's specifications.

Noah's response to God is put simply in scripture: "Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him. (Gen 6:22)

Noah had one of the qualities that leaders need:
he had a vision, specifically God's vision.

Because Noah was a righteous man – a man who had a relationship with God, he probably already sensed that the world was changing, and believed that God would somehow make things right again. Noah would know that some preparation for the change would be needed.

So Noah was ready and willing to listen when God spoke to him and in listening he heard God's vision for a new creation and the promise of a new covenant with creation.

Leaders need to see the vision and they need to think ahead.

I think we all have some sort of vision for our lives. I'm sure the parents of these children who have been baptized have a vision for their family and their children.

It might be what you hope your child will become and it is probably a vision of how you want to live your life. You have, after all, intentionally brought your child into a community bound together by faith and hope, a community of faith that gives expression to God's vision.

God has gifted each of you to be visionary leaders as you parent your children – listen and use your God given gifts to live out God's vision and purpose for your life.

God needed Noah, a visionary leader to bring about change in creation and God still needs leaders who carry his vision of peace, justice and goodness for all of creation.

Noah had other leadership qualities that God needed as well - inner strength, commitment and fortitude were all necessary to do what Noah did. Let's face it, the task of building the ark is mind boggling – 450' long by 75' wide by 45' high. That's taller than a 3 storey building and a deck the size of 36 tennis courts.

You have to wonder why all the measurements are listed in the scripture. Why is this detail important? What is God trying to tell us?

Last November when I was on a flight returning from Vancouver, I watched the movie *Evan Almighty*. I figured it was probably one that Lloyd wouldn't want to see and I needed something light to unwind from my meetings. It was strangely heart warming, silly and hopeful all bound together. The basic premise is that God calls a modern day Noah named Evan, played by actor Steve Carrell, to build an ark like boat. You see, people are tinkering with the environment, changing waterways and dams, and God knows the town is going to be flooded.

As Evan changes physically – to look more like we would imagine Noah to look, and, as he reluctantly builds the boat, it is the reaction of his friends and neighbours that reveals Evan's faithfulness to the task God has called him. Building a boat in the lot next to your suburban home can tend to draw attention.

And it is precisely that attention that is important to the overall vision. Leaders who are strong enough, committed enough, to stand against negative press and public opinion draw attention to the vision they are living out. Leaders with vision, commitment and audacious hope help others to catch a glimpse and maybe even jump on board.

Sharon Daloz Parks writes in her book 'Leadership Can Be Taught', that one of the primary characteristics of the artistry of leadership is the willingness to work on an edge

- the edge between the familiar and the emergent, the known problems and the unknown solutions, popularity and anxious hostility.

She says that creativity emerges when working on the edge stirs into being something new and unprecedented. It is the character of leadership that is needed at this threshold time in human history. (p.210)

Noah is a pivotal character in the unfolding of human history. Without his faithful response to God, his strength and determination and his creativity working on the edge, the world might have been a very different place. The survival of all that lives depends on Noah's leadership qualities.

We know it to be true – the actions of a few courageous, visionary leaders can benefit many others.

On February 26 of this year, in Norway, opening ceremonies were held for the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. 425' inside a frozen mountain, 1000 km from the North Pole at a constant temperature of -18 is the 'Noah's Ark' for seeds.

This structure was built to secure biological diversity for future generations. It is an insurance policy for the world's food supply. Millions of seeds preserved against environmental catastrophe, war, natural disaster, civil strife and lack of funding.

A project of the Norwegian government and the Global Crop Diversity Trust with a vision for the survival of the world.

God through Noah and his visionary leadership, renewed creation and re-established a right relationship between God and humankind.

How is God calling each of us and together as a community of faith to live out God's vision?

The world around us is changing, and, I think, not exactly the way God would want it to be.

Hunger, violence, disease, catastrophic environmental events, floods, earthquakes, melting ice caps.

We all sense it, we know humankind needs to change its ways if we are to survive. And the good news is that there are so many people leading the way to change, preparing and preserving the goodness of creation.

People with determination and courage, like Andrew and Leonora Obara in Kenya who work with children orphaned by Aids – people leading on the edge of hope and despair.

You may not be called to visionary leadership in the same way, but you are called to live out your God given gifts.

Listen and discover what they are, who God has created you to be and how you too can participate in God's vision for creation.

May it be so.
Amen