

## **Sermon for 26 September 2021 (Harvest)**

### **Caring for Creation - with Noah!**

#### **3. A new start: give thanks and recommit**

*Please read Genesis 8.15 – 9.3,8-17.*

Today, we have the final instalment in our series on Noah, and it fits really well with Harvest. Harvest is a time to give thanks to God, and Noah gives thanks to God for deliverance from the flood by carrying out a sacrifice. I trust the animals reproduced on the ark before some of them were sacrificed! At Harvest we give thanks to God for his provision, and here, following the flood, God says that he will provide: 'Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you.' (9.3) This isn't the first time that God has said this. It takes us back to the creation in Genesis 1 (verses 29-30 in particular), the only difference being that it's only now, after the flood, that humans are told they can eat animals. That's not something to get too bogged down in today! The basic point is that God the creator provides food and so many other things for us through his creation, and we need to give thanks.

#### **A new start?**

But if you've been here over the past few weeks, you'll know that we've been relating this story to caring for creation and the climate crisis. And you might be wondering what this part of the story could possibly say to us. Could it be saying that one day, just as the flood went away, the climate crisis will also be completely sorted out and we'll have nothing to worry about? I'd love to think that, but it doesn't seem very realistic. Of course, if you were looking ahead to the new heaven and earth that God has promised in the future, then I'd say it will all be sorted out in the future. But Noah isn't about the new heaven and earth. In the story of Noah, after the flood normal life on earth resumes. And part of that is that people continue to sin.

This part of the story is a new start, almost like a new creation, but there is still human failure. And perhaps that's more relevant to us today than just saying that one day everything will be OK. We live in a world of human failure, and it's in that context that we have to keep caring for the

world that God has given to us. There will continue to be setbacks as well as, hopefully, progress.

## **A new agreement**

But the flood leads to something else. God now establishes a covenant – a very solemn, binding agreement – not just with people but with the whole creation. He says, ‘Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.’ (9.11) God recommits himself to life on earth. He is totally committed to us! So whatever the crises we have today, he is a God who is with us and for us.

Two weeks ago, we said that God’s solution started with one man. One man, Noah, was chosen by God, so that life on earth could be saved. But in some ways Noah seems to predict another man, who came a long time after the story of Noah was written; another man who was chosen by God to save the world. We know that man as Jesus. He was God, yet came to live with us as a human being, going through everything that we go through. He really was with us and for us! And he brought about a new covenant by dying on the cross. Jesus’ death means we can be forgiven without carrying out sacrifices. Jesus’ death means we can really know that we are forgiven for all the mess we make of God’s world and the hurt we inflict on other people. And his death led to the resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit for everyone, the establishment of the kingdom of God, and the hope of eternal life for us all.

God gives Noah a special sign for remembering the covenant – the rainbow. It’s become a sign of hope for many people. But a greater sign of hope is the resurrection of Jesus. It tells us not just that the rain is over, but that death has been done away with and we have resurrection power even now through the Holy Spirit. So we still live in a context of sin and failure, but we also live in a context of new life and resurrection power. And those things should give us strength as we work and pray for the world to be a better place. There really should be hope for the world right now because of Jesus, and his followers have a key role to play.

## Hope in Malawi

One wonderful sign of hope is the project in Malawi that we're supporting for Harvest this year. The Christian Aid video for this features a 31-year-old woman called Janet who has three children. Her home was destroyed during Cyclone Idai in 2019, leaving the family homeless. After the floods it was hard to find food, and most of the time they would only eat once a day. But then, Janet joined the Makande Women's Group that produces baobab juice to sell at the market. The money she has earned has helped her to feed her children and rebuild the house. She says, 'Our family has changed; we are now happy as we are able to eat balanced meals.'

Supported by Christian Aid's partner, Eagles Relief and Development, the women received training, equipment and a low-cost loan to set up and grow their business. Now they make up to 6000 bottles of baobab juice a month, and have increased their income tenfold. In the wider community 188 jobs have been created through the women's enterprises. As more women join the group, they learn valuable skills from other members, improving the lives of even more women.

Christian Aid and its partners are now building a new solar powered processing facility for the group. The public hydroelectricity in Malawi can turn off at any moment, but going solar will guarantee a constant supply of electricity, which they need to preserve the juice in refrigerators. So, people working together, families brought out of poverty and given hope, and a new way of powering the refrigerators that's reliable as well as eco friendly.

A couple of weeks ago, I thought our first talk on Noah was rather heavy with doom and gloom. So it's good to hear about this project, and it's good to remember that lots of things are being done across the world to lift people out of the poverty which is being made even worse by the climate crisis. It's also good to celebrate things that are being done to generate renewable energy. All of this is a sign of hope.

But we have to keep working hard at this. There's no room for complacency. We need to change our ways, and we need to discover new ways of doing things – just like the new start that the world had in the story of Noah. And if we do that, there really is hope.

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We started today thinking about God's provision and his covenant. Those come together in this wonderful promise to Noah:

'As long as the earth endures,  
seedtime and harvest,  
cold and heat,  
summer and winter,  
day and night  
will never cease.' (v.22)

It would have been a shame not to mention that 'harvest' actually comes in today's reading! But there's something rather unsettling when we read these words today. The seasons are changing. We seem to be seeing that to some extent in the UK, but people in places like Malawi are seeing it even more. The weather patterns they relied on for generations have become less predictable. Floods and droughts are far more frequent. But they really need rain at the right time to sow, grow and reap a good harvest.

There *is* a climate crisis. We therefore need to listen and obey. We have to pray. We have to work together with others, together with creation, and together with God. We must not give up, but be hopeful, trusting in the power of Jesus.

## **Recommit**

God is completely committed to us. Can we be completely committed to caring for his creation? That's what Operation Noah (a Christian environmental charity) is calling people to do at the moment. They are calling us to make a commitment as a local church community to taking long term action to reduce our own greenhouse gas emissions. We are starting to do this by working towards being an Eco church. It was wonderful to hold our first eco event – 'Wildlife and Grow' – yesterday. But we have more to do as a church, and we can't really do it unless we also work at our individual lifestyles in whatever way we can. So, will you recommit yourself this Harvest to caring for God's creation and doing all you can to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Would you please do it for the benefit of people like Janet in Malawi?

*Richard Wise*