

SLOWLY - we're working our way through the first half of the Old Testament in this 7 week sermon series. Today we're looking at a portion of Genesis - still in the first book - learning about the patriarchs Noah and Abraham. I encourage you now, those who are able and interested, open your own Bible or one on the seat next to you to look at Genesis chapter 6 with me. Genesis is the 1st book in the Bible, so it's easy to find.

Last week we were in chapter 4 looking at the brothers Cain & Abel, so yes we are moving - SLOWLY through the Old Testament. Since these sermons build on each other somewhat, I encourage you, if you missed last week's sermon, to go back and watch it on our YouTube channel or read the transcript from our website found under "Sundays" on the front page of the website.

Thanks to Sharon this morning, we heard part of the end of Noah's story, but it actually begins in chapter 6 of Genesis. It's a strange beginning. Maybe you've never heard it before or maybe this will remind you of what you've read. Please read Genesis 6:1-8.

I want you to see and hear again verses 5-8. That the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, but Noah found favor with God. From the beginning, in the Biblical story of creation, we see that free will, human choice, is built into our framework of existence. Even though God tells Adam and Eve not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they exercise free will and choose to eat it anyway. Christian tradition calls this "original sin". It's that part of us that tends toward disobedience, selfishness, apathy or even malice. In our reading from last week - we remember that God told Abel - "sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, for you must master it."

As the story of Noah goes, it seems Noah was the only one able to master it. Read now verses 11 through 13 of chapter 6:

From there God tells Noah to make an ark - in essence a very large boat - and God instructs Noah how to do that. God chooses to save not only Noah, but his whole household (his wife, his three sons and their wives) and not only two of every living creature, but also seven pairs of clean animals for sacrifice later AND all the food everyone on the ark

will need to eat. It must have been a VERY large boat.

But one of the questions I have, and maybe you do too, is - if Noah is named by God as the "only righteous one before me", why is Noah's household saved on the ark also?

The answer is - "Kinship".

The earliest people were organized into family units and the rules of society were based on kinship. In Genesis 4:9 last week when God asked Cain about his brother Abel and what happened to him, Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Basically, the answer was, Yes. Society was built upon family. What happened to one person in a family, in essence, happened to everyone in the family. They were to care for each other as themselves.

There is a phrase Adam is recorded saying, talking about when God created Eve, from Genesis 2:23 that might be familiar and touches upon this when he says, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

In a sense we people - created by God - are responsible for one another. This idea gets even more focused when we as Christians talk about being sisters and brothers in Christ. We're not all of the same bloodline, but we are adopted children of God through Jesus, which makes us kin in the family of God.

### Kinship

I see signs of this kinship everywhere in our church on a daily basis. We like to pray for one another - not only those in our own congregation or our own families - but every Sunday there are several requests here in worship to pray for those who very well might not know Jesus as their Savior yet. We feel a kinship for them.

Just last week, one of our faithful women in our congregation was led by God to create Mother's Day cards for those women in our church who can't get to worship anymore - we call them "shut-ins", because they are not able to get out anymore. Her son even drew an original picture in each of the cards.

A few months ago, a few other faithful women felt led to start a new group just for elementary kids to support them. This new group has

met twice now - they meet every two weeks. They create a craft and include a bible lesson - right now it's called "Crafternoon". You'll probably hear more about it as summer keeps going. These women who started this felt a connection and love for our elementary students and wanted to find a way to pour into their lives in a fun way and meaningful way. All of these are examples of kinship. Of the calling in our lives to care for one another - to be one another's keeper.

Where did the idea of kinship come from? From God. We remember the words in the creation story of Genesis 1:26 when God says, "Let us make people in our image, in our likeness.." God's nature in essence is relationship - even in Genesis we have this plural form of the word for God in Hebrew - Elohim - Let US make people in OUR image. Some say this alludes to the pre-existence of Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit working together from the beginning to create the world and everything in it. Kinship.

Our text for today outlines the next step in God's connection with us and among us as kin belonging to each other - that next step is covenant. Covenant is a word we don't really use in our modern day language. We use the word contract a LOT. A contract is a binding document where two or more entities agree to something, but it includes arrangements for how to dissolve the contract if this or that happens. A contract is created with the awareness and possible expectation that changing circumstances or choices might bring it to an end. It's conditional. It's about legal rights and benefits.

A covenant, on the other hand, is an UNCONDITIONAL PROMISE having to do with relationship. It doesn't include stipulations for ending the promise depending on certain conditions. A covenant is meant to be unending.

In America, the marriage COVENANT is also a CONTRACT. In marriage there is a legal document that both spouses, the pastor or judge and two witnesses have to sign. Without that, the marriage isn't legal. I remember going to the DMV a few years ago to get my Real ID and since my maiden name - Pearson - is different than my married name, I had to have my marriage license with me as legal proof of my identity.

Genesis 9:8-17 outlines the very first covenant God makes with God's people. Not a contract, but a covenant. There are about seven covenants God makes with us in the Bible. The first one is this promise that God will never again let all life be cut off by floodwaters - never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. And the symbol of the covenant will be the rainbow in the clouds.

If you think about it, this new thing God does is unimaginable. Our Living God - three in One - chooses to make a covenant, an unconditional promise with humans, with God's created ones. The all powerful, all knowing, all encompassing God makes a promise to us - to me and to you. It's revolutionary, incomprehensible - it's a sign of how much God loves us.

In this tableau of God's great love for God's creation - comes the next important person in the Old Testament that we want to get to know today. Abraham - or as we first meet him, Abram.

Please read Genesis 15:1-18. We'll learn a little about Abram before we end for today.

It's true that animal sacrifice was a cornerstone of the relationship between God and God's people in the Old Testament - before Jesus. If you read Leviticus you'll hear accounts of sacrifice and about lots of blood. Even in the story of Noah today we heard God telling him to put 7 pairs of animals aside for sacrifice - as well as two of each kind.

Here in Genesis 15 we hear about an extremely important ritual in ancient times. When people made a deal in those days, they'd walk down an aisle flanked by sacrificed animals cut in half - as it says in verse 10 - "the halves arranged opposite each other." It would be a symbol of an oath. The oath was, "May this also be done to me if I do not keep my oath and pledge." This is what's meant to "cut a deal." The Hebrew word for covenant comes from the root of "to cut". When these types of animals were gathered and cut in two and placed in this way in ancient times, an agreement was being made between people.

Normally this ritual was among either people of equal status or between a person in a lower class and royalty. The ritual would include both people taking turns walking between the cut animals - to cut

the deal. Or in the case of royalty, a servant would walk between the cut animals in their place.

But here - in Genesis 15:17 - "After the sun had set and darkness had deepened" - basically after Abram and everyone was asleep - "a smoking vessel with a fiery flame passed between the split-open animals. That day the Lord cut a covenant with Abraham." What this means is that instead of two people making a deal and taking turns walking between the animals, taking on the repercussions of a broken deal, here - only one side makes the promise by himself, taking on the penalty by himself. Not only that, but the words in Hebrew for "smoking vessel" and "fiery flame" are the same words used for God later in the Old Testament when God leads the Isrealites through the wilderness as a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night. God's very self goes between the animals, taking the vow upon himself to pay the penalty all by himself. Sounds familiar, right. Reminds me of the words of Jesus as he hung from the cross and uttered the words - Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

From the covenant made with Noah to the New Covenant - Jesus's life given for our own - we continue to be a covenant people only by the grace of God.