

Sermon Family Service 3 July 2010  
Subject: Noah's Ark Genesis 7-9

Dear parishioners

What a vivid story about Noah, his ark and the animals walking two by two into the ark! Not only children seem to be very drawn to that quite dramatic story but also for me as an adult it is intriguing to listen to what is happening and I'm inspired by the beauty of this story. It is of course not only a nice little story but also a story that includes an image of God that is quite difficult to understand at first glance. It is the image of God the destroyer. In Genesis chapter 6 it is described that God regretted having created human beings and therefore decided to destroy them all and to spare only Noah, his family and all the animals that would fit into the ark that Noah was going to build.

I'm quoting from chapter 6:

**5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.**  
**6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.**

Isn't it a terrible thought that God wants to destroy what he had initially created? How can he be so cruel! It does not go well with the image that most of us have of God, as being the one who cares about us human beings and who is the peaceful God who sent his son Jesus because of his boundless love for us. For example today with the baptism of Conrad Mosimann we celebrated the beginning of a new life and remembered that it is part of our Christian belief that we think of God as the creator who also stands behind every new life, which is so precious. To have a child baptised helps to raise our awareness that every child is a gift of God and that it is our faith that God the creator stands behind all life.

So how come that in the story about Noah and the Ark, God was described as not caring about human beings and even regretted having created them? This is quite a thought provoking aspect of this story, but it seems one that shouldn't be neglected. It is often

the unexpected and maybe irritating parts of the Biblical stories that can reveal some new ideas for our faith to us.

Reflecting on why God would be described as the destroyer in the Old Testament I thought of Sunday two weeks ago when the Hindu Festival of Rathayatra took place here in London. Hundreds of Hindus came together for their procession, which ended in Trafalgar Square. Some parishioners from our church went there to watch the end of this impressive event, in which three deities were pulled through the streets of London on three carriages. It was for me very intriguing to hear that one of the Hindu gods is seen as the creator, he is called Brahma and the other one is seen as the destroyer, he is called Shiva. So the Hindu religion represents both of these aspects of life in two gods. But the significant difference of course compared to Christian faith is that they have different gods for different aspects of life, whereas we believe in one God who includes all of those aspects. Talking to one of the leaders at the festival I learnt that in their religion it is an important aspect to be aware that life is a cycle of life and death and that therefore there are different gods responsible for those forces in life. I feel this is an interesting concept because it includes not only the positive side of life but also the negative one, but of course the Hindu wouldn't consider it as positive or negative but just as different parts.

This idea helps me to make better sense of Noah's story, because there as well we find exactly these two sides of life and as a result of that, these two sides of God. In the first part of the story God destroys everything on earth because he was angry about human beings' behaviour. In this statement we also find an attempt to explain why God has created human beings that are capable of doing such cruel things as are still happening today. I think this is a very good point and I'm sure many of us have sometimes asked ourselves how it is possible that human beings are capable of doing such terrible things to other human beings, as well as being capable of exploiting and destroying nature. Wouldn't it be so much better if God had created us as perfect creatures and none of this would be happening? I think this is one of the implicit questions that stand behind the actually terrible idea of God destroying everything and only sparing one family.

To answer this question we have to look at the second part of the story, where God sets the rainbow in the clouds as a sign for his new covenant with human beings, showing that this dreadful flood

shall never happen again. Despite human beings not being any different, God offers his peace and forgiveness. And it is this new covenant that we are celebrating with each baptism, which is also an expression of God's grace towards us human beings and that we are accepted and loved the way that we are without our own merit or effort. In the New Testament this new covenant was underlined by the way Jesus encountered people from all different backgrounds and in the message of forgiveness and love that he preached. And when we share bread and wine together in the Holy Communion we remember exactly this new covenant and by doing so it becomes again part of our lives and of our identity.

It is this second part of the story of Noah's Ark that I would like to stress and which is definitely more important for me. Nonetheless I realised that I am also quite fascinated by these two aspects of describing God. Also realising how many things in life are not just good or bad but somehow include both aspects. This is beautifully shown in the element water. In the first part of the story everything is being destroyed by water, and it is a very negative force behind this huge amount of water. But in the second part, exactly the same element water together with the sun creates this beautiful rainbow in the clouds as a symbol for this new covenant, which is a sign of God's forgiveness. Isn't this fascinating? I think this can be a challenge when we look at our own lives to realise that often the very same thing has two different sides to it and mainly the way we look at it decides whether we experience it in a positive or in a negative way. I invite you therefore to think of the rainbows in your lives but also to think of the rainfalls and to reflect on how these two parts might be linked with each other.

Amen