

SERMON: WHAT'S THE POINT?

SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 8:6-22 (ICB)

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GENESIS 8:6-22 (International Children's Bible)

6 Forty days later Noah opened the window he had made in the boat. **7** He sent out a raven. It flew here and there until the water had dried up from the earth. **8** Then Noah sent out a dove. This was to find out if the water had dried up from the ground. **9** The dove could not find a place to land because water still covered the earth. So it came back to the boat. Noah reached out his hand and took the bird. And he brought it back into the boat.

10 After seven days Noah again sent out the dove from the boat. **11** And that evening it came back to him with a fresh olive leaf in its mouth. Then Noah knew that the ground was almost dry. **12** Seven days later he sent the dove out again. But this time it did not come back.

13 Noah was now 601 years old. It was the first day of the first month of that year. The water was dried up from the land. Noah removed the covering of the boat and saw that the land was dry. **14** By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the land was completely dry.

15 Then God said to Noah, **16** "You and your wife, your sons and their wives should go out of the boat. **17** Bring every animal out of the boat with you—the birds, animals and everything that crawls on the earth. Let them have many young ones and let them grow in number."

18 So Noah went out with his sons, his wife and his sons' wives. **19** Every animal, everything that crawls on the earth and every bird went out of the boat. They left by families.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord. Noah took some of all the clean birds and animals. And he burned them on the altar as offerings to God. **21** The Lord was pleased with these sacrifices. He said to himself, "I will never again curse the ground because of human beings. Their thoughts are evil even when they are young. But I will never again destroy every living thing on the earth as I did this time.

22 "As long as the earth continues, there will be planting and harvest.

Cold and hot,
summer and winter,
day and night

will not stop.”

Sermon: What's the Point?

Welcome to Week 3 of our series, “*Back to the Basics: A Walk Through Genesis.*” We started with God creating the world, full of beauty and order and promise. Last week, we saw how God keeps looking for us when we are lost, beginning with Adam and Eve. And today, we arrive at one of the Bible’s most famous stories—Noah and the Ark.

At first glance, it seems like a children’s story about animals marching two by two. But when you really read it, it’s not cute at all. It’s raw, it’s tragic, it’s unsettling. God looks at the world He made and says, “It is full of corruption and violence.” It seems like the “basics” of God’s loving gift to humankind very quickly devolved into something broken. Humanity has gone so far astray that God decides to start again, and only Noah and his family are spared.

And yet, the “fresh start” doesn’t last long. At the end of this story after a beautiful, lengthy speech from God about rainbows and a promise to stay faithful to humankind no matter what — Noah plants a vineyard, he gets drunk, exposes himself, and curses his son. Even the “righteous man” chosen to preserve humanity falls right back into sin within mere sentences of a redemptive story arc!

If you’ve been following these first chapters of Genesis with us, you might have noticed the pattern: we mess up, God responds by pressing a reset button to “try again” with humanity. Over and over. Adam and Eve disobey and are sent from Eden. Cain kills Abel. Humanity fills the earth with violence, and God sends a flood. Even the restart with Noah falls apart.

Which leads to a very real question: *what’s the point?*

If God keeps giving us chances and we keep blowing it, why does He stick with us? And on the flip side—if we can never seem to get it right, why should we bother trying?

I hear versions of this question often, especially when I talk to people who don’t identify as religious. They’ll say, “Look, you don’t need faith to know killing is wrong, or that kindness is good.” And they’re right—plenty of non-religious people are caring, generous, and moral. So, what difference does faith actually make?

Great question: if people who follow God aren’t less messy than anyone else, what’s the point? Yet, at the end of flood story, God doesn’t say to Noah, “Now go be a good person and never mess up again.” Instead, He says something surprising:

“Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. Never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.”

God knows we're going to stumble again—and still He promises to stay faithful. Just like in Eden when he responds to the first sin by searching for us, also in the flood story, He chooses covenant over condemnation. The point isn't that humanity finally got it right—the point is that, again, and again, and again, God refused to give up on us.

Reflecting on things going wrong is some of what we're doing after worship. Today, the committee that oversaw our interns this summer is meeting to review the evaluations. And if we're honest, it was a summer with some high points, but also some very real disappointments. We didn't see an increase in worship attendance, even after all the effort put into new programs. Our interns had creative ideas and brought fresh energy, but they also had conflicts with one another that were hard to navigate.

That's not easy for us to face. Because deep down, many of us wanted this summer to be a "fresh start." A chance to step into new growth and new vitality. But if we look only at the outcomes, we might feel like we failed.

And that brings us right back to Noah. Because the flood didn't fix humanity either. A "fresh start" alone wasn't enough. The rainbow promise wasn't about us getting it right—it was about God choosing to stay with us when we got it wrong.

So, again – *what is the point?*

This is where faith makes all the difference. Faith doesn't pretend the failures didn't happen. Faith doesn't magically erase conflict or guarantee numerical growth. What faith does is give us a different lens through which to view those failures.

Studies show that people of faith often experience stronger bonds of community, deeper resilience in suffering, and greater hope in uncertainty. Neuroscience even shows that prayer, worship, and trust in God literally rewire our brains, shaping us to handle stress and struggle differently.

In other words, faith doesn't mean we don't fall. It means we fall differently: we fall into the arms of a God who refuses to let us go.

Think about what that means in your own life. Some of you are carrying grief over loved ones you've lost. Some are navigating family conflict, or health struggles, or the challenges of growing older. Some are working hard in jobs where you don't always feel valued, or raising children and wondering if you're doing enough. And as a church, we're living in the tension between a glorious past and an uncertain future.

If all we had was logic, we might look at those realities and despair. We might say: "It's too late. The church isn't sustainable. The problems are too big." The burdens of our lives like loss and disappointment could threaten to overwhelm us as the odds seem immeasurably against us: we are, after all, in a 100% fatal trajectory on this earth, and if there's one thing that's true besides death is that you can't control or predict *anything* with total certainty. Logically, really, we should

all just give up. *What is the point?*

But faith gives us another story. Faith says: God hasn't given up. God is still faithful. God's promise still holds. That's why the covenant that God creates in the wake of our failure matters. Not because humanity finally fixed itself, but because God promised, "I will never again curse the ground... I will never again destroy every living creature." He knew we'd fall short again, but He bound Himself to us anyway.

So the point of Noah's story—and the point of our story—isn't just that we mess up. It's that God stays with us. Always. And if God hasn't given up on us, then neither should we.

But let's be specific. What does that mean for us as we think about next year's programs?

First, it means we don't measure our worth by numbers alone that are dependent on our small, human understanding of growth. Yes, we will continue to pay attention to our sustainability in a practical way, but success is not just about size—it's about depth. Are we building discipleship? Are we serving others? Are we deepening our faith together?

anyway.

Amen.