

# **Sermon for June 21, 2015**

*by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

I Peter 3:13-20, Genesis 6:11-22

“Obeying God”

There is something exciting about a baptism that catches all of us off guard and gives us a sense that something new is happening here. When a baby is baptized we look forward to strengthening the parents as they raise their child up in the Christian faith. When we baptize adults we celebrate their devotion to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, same as a rededication. There is always a certain sense of starting over and new beginnings with every baptism that takes place. It is true that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The world looks toward a new beginning, some with anxiety and some with elation. As Christians we have a distinct advantage over other people. We have a perspective that no one else has. It is our duty to look with the eyes of history because we know that God is in control and our responsibility first and foremost is to obey God. When that happens then we can stand on the promises that he has made.

I say that on this Father’s Day, a day of celebration and thanks for those men who have raised children or have been mentors in the lives of children. I say this on a day when we baptize and rededicate and that as Christians we can celebrate and dance because we can visible see that Jesus is Lord. But we also say this as we mourn the death of Christians in a church here in the United States, as they were praying, their heads bowed, obeying God by going to him. We find ourselves in times where violence seems to rule our society and our culture.

In Scripture we find this theme of the more things change the more they stay the same. We go through cycles of obedience and fellowship with God and then next thing we know there is tragic disobedience and a need to start all over again. This morning we will be reading about Noah and he happens to be one who allows God to do great things in his life because of one thing: he obeys God. Let’s see how we can be obedient to God and open ourselves to God’s great work in our lives and thus God’s great work in the world.

Some years back a powerful movie came out that was called Schindler’s list. This movie was taken from a Thomas Keneally novel that was originally titled Schindler’s Ark. The movie and the book is about this man, a business man, who hires Jews to work in his factories in order to save them from extermination. He saved thousands of Jews

and to this day he is called by the Jewish people a “righteous gentile”. The Ark title was a result of the death and the destruction that was happening around the factory while inside were kept those who were saved from the massacre. In the midst of confusion and chaos the factory served as a place of refuge, an ark.

Today we heard the first part of the Noah story when God tells Noah what to do. This is before any rain, just a command by God. You realize that in chapter 1 of Genesis, 7 times God calls all that he made, his beloved creation from the stars to the sand, from the plants to the people, he called everything good. But now six chapters and 10 generations later, my oh my how things have changed. 7 times in this chapter the Word of God describes the situation on earth, speaks about God’s creation not as good but as wicked, evil, violent. My how things have changed. This is a direct result of one thing: obedience, or rather a lack of it. Something had to be done. God sadly watches as his creation begins the downward spiral and spins out of control.

I am an optimist in all situations, but a shooting in a church really sends me into a place where I wonder if the earth was ever as violent as we are experiencing now. That was God’s main hangup with the people. They were corrupt and they were violent.

Can you imagine God going out and searching the earth, his entire beloved creation for people who had not sold out, for those who had not forsaken him? He searched everywhere to find hopefully at least a pocket of righteous families, a remnant. But instead he only finds one man who was righteous. It wasn’t that he was more righteous than others, because that would not have been enough, he was the only one who was righteous. Noah was a righteous man and he found favor in the sight of God. Noah’s righteousness is amazing. Think about it.

We may make an inspired choice or a righteous godly decision every now and then. But Noah was righteous for nearly 1,000 years. Now he was a righteous man for a very long time. We see that it is because of his righteousness that God chose him and because of his obedience that God was able to work in the world and eventually save it from absolute and complete annihilation.

There are many similarities to our world and what we find in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis. The violence that filled Noah’s world could have matched the violence and the evil in which we find ourselves. But who of us would be able to match Noah’s righteousness and be singled out by God to lead a group of true survivors? Do you think God would have chosen one of us? Why not? Does it bother us not to have the

righteousness of Noah, or even of Job. What is it that makes our disobedience seem almost secondary?

Who of us would or could be chosen? Romans states that no one is just before God, not one for we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Not a one of us is worthy of even getting out an umbrella because we fall short of what God requires which is what Micah states to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

In our Scripture God was able to save humankind because there was one righteous person. Noah did all that God commanded. Without Noah's obedience God's work would have had to have taken a different route. Noah's obedience allows God to work his ultimate salvation. What Noah had is what God ultimately desires in us: righteousness and obedience.

Whenever my mom comes to visit the girls love for her to tell stories about her days as a young teenager growing up on the mission field in the Congo, stories of her family. But their favorite stories were of when their dad, that would be me, disobeyed and had to be punished. They howl with laughter thinking of their dad being grounded. There is something in all of us that takes some relief in knowing that no one is righteous, not even dad.

Most people see the flood as an act of a vengeful and an angry God who borders upon being an angry tyrant. I've always looked at it differently. If we consider God to be our Father, then the flood is more the act of a concerned parent. Is God not more saddened than he is angry? Of course he is. This destruction is not rage, but rather you need to think of the rain that fell those forty days and those forty nights to be God's tears of grief over the state and condition of his creation. This is proven by how God allows a new beginning to take place through Noah. God in the flood actually saved the earth by allowing us to start over. And this salvation through Noah was a new beginning that could take place only because of his obedience. Out of one righteous person God started over. As Morgan Freeman said...Let's just say that whatever I do, I do because I love you.

Doesn't that sound familiar? What did Jesus do? Jesus Christ came to this earth when there was no other choice other than God himself taking the form of a man to save humanity from the end result toward which it was going. Paul states that the Gospel

message can be found in the fact that Jesus was obedient even to the point of the cross. God can work in and through us only if we are able to be called to obedience.

I Peter 3 tells us that it is God's desire that every person come to know and love him, even obey him. So much so that he preached to those in hell in order to bring them out so they could live lives of obedience.

Today we are in need of a new beginning the kind that we saw in the baptism, one on the magnitude that we see in Noah and through our Savior Jesus Christ. A new beginning where we are not afraid to obey God because it will hurt our reputation. A new beginning where obedience is considered wise and not weak. A new beginning where we can see the path where obedience will lead us as opposed to navel gazing and reacting to situations with no long-term vision.

It is a new day and we are called to be the catalysts of this new beginning. We can only be so if Jesus Christ is a part of our life and his righteousness shows through our works and our obedience allows God to work in us and through us. We are called as obedient and righteous Christians to build our arks in public, as Schindler did in his factory, as Noah did with his ark. This could mean standing for something that is unpopular but ultimately you know it could save those around you, even if putting you in danger is part of the result. Think of the ridicule Noah received as he obeyed God's ludicrous command to build a massive ark in beautiful weather. We also are called to step out in faith and away from what society expects from us so we can please and obey God.

A new beginning is marked by obedience to God's word and commandments. And this is crucial. But how do we know God's commandments? Noah was able to discern God's Word and voice because even before he was given building instructions he was righteous, he had spent his days listening for and talking to God. That is how we hear God's commandments, by listening in prayer. Don't wait for the rain to start falling to begin listening to God and reading his word and praying. So many of us are that way, Crisis Christians, I would call it. Only in crisis do we find our spirituality, or do we turn to God. No, start now. Noah was ready for God long before God spoke to him. We need to begin obeying God now so that we will be ready when God calls us to a specific task.

We can be a part of God's new beginning only once we realize that God loves us so much in Jesus Christ that when Christ came he didn't come to save one family but the entire earth, all of God's creation. Our obedience is required if we are going to love God

back and present our lives before God as clay to be molded as lives to be used so that his kingdom and his glory will be proclaimed through us and by us. Amen.