

“Consuming Covenant”  
A, Pentecost 4; 10:00 am  
Genesis 7:1-24; July 2, 2017  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

## **I. ONCE UPON A NOAH**

One upon a time. Once upon a time, there was a flood. There was a man in that time named Noah who was told by Yahweh God to go, build an ark, and get ready for that flood. Since there wasn't a cloud in the sky at the moment, this seemed a little far-fetched. Or a *lot* far-fetched!

And once upon a time, the man named Noah decided, in spite of the neighbors thinking he was a little nuts—or a *lot* nuts—to follow those blueprints and build an ark. And then that man named Noah decided to further follow this Yahweh God's instructions, and put two pair of every kind of animal into the ark before it started raining.

And for *more* days than Noah and his family could count (almost!) it rained. It rained and it poured. It poured and it rained. It gully-washed! It washed out villages and homes, farmer's fields and ranchers' ranges.

And the man named Noah, because he'd built the ark according to the ridiculous-looking blueprints, on a bluebird sky day, long before the first drop fell.....because he listened to this God named Yahweh that he was *just* getting acquainted with—they *all* were, in fact—because of all that, he came out the other side of that gully-washer alive and well, family intact, perhaps a *little* overcome by the animal aroma, but otherwise? A-okay!

## **II. FLOODS ABOUND!**

Once upon a time, floods happened a lot. They still *do*. But once upon a time, in the days of Noah, there wasn't just one story *told* about floods. *Many* ancient cultures experienced epic floods and told epic stories about them down through time. Sumerians, Africans, Babylonians—to name a few.

So, I hate to burst our bubble here in the Judao-Christian tradition, but Noah is *not* the only Flood Hero. He's *not* the only guy who built a boat to survive a flood. Take a moment to take that in. *Our* biblical Flood Story and *our* Hero Noah are not necessarily unique.

## **III. WHAT ARE FLOODS CAUSED BY?**

But, I'll tell you what. There *is* something in our tradition's story that is *exceptionally* unique. Wait! Is that grammatically correct? Can you *be* “exceptionally unique?”

Let's back up “behind the music” and take a closer look at this epic event.

Imagine being alive in the ancient world and things happened. From time to time or all the time. Things beyond your control and *out* of control. The world didn't seem to have much order or control to it at all—there must be forces and fickle powers at work.

Oh, that's it! The gods. The *gods* must be running things, and we are clearly helpless pawns at their mercy.

Well, if the gods are *running* things and they decide to send down a TON of water upon us, our fields, our livestock, and pretty much wipe us out, the gods must be **angry!!** Pretty simple to figure out.

Floods, along with a lot of natural disasters, be they famine, pestilence, earthquake, hurricane—you name it— were seen throughout the ancient world as proof that the gods were **fed up** with the way the humans were acting, and were basically starting over with the world. Wiping the slate clean.

## **IV. WHAT IS UNIQUE**

So, up until the day Noah sticks his big toe out the door of the ark and starts to wonder if *maybe* it's stopped raining, this story has run along pretty much the same as other flood

events—even the fishy “prequel” part where one guy got a little hint to get to Home Depot and start getting prepared.

But then, this flood story takes a definite *twist*. And it happens around something as seemingly ordinary as a rainbow.

For once upon a time, a new God came on the scene. Or, more accurately, a new understanding in the conceptions of human beings about a very old God who had been here all along. This was not “father’s Oldsmobile.” A god just like your fathers’ gods. For once upon a God named Yahweh eased onto the scene and people’s understanding of God eased into a new gear. This Flood Moment was one of those “thin times” when the veil between human and God was sheer.

For this flood started like the others—seemingly caused by human depravity and divine anger and judgment. But it ended with the Divine reaching out with a sign, a promise, and new direction for relationship.

Rob Bell, in “*What Is the Bible?*” lays it out in these terms. Good news, gospel kinda terms.

“But this story, this story is about a God who wants to *relate*—  
A God who want to *save*—  
A God who wants to live in *covenant*.”

This story is about a new view of God.  
Not a God who wants to wipe people out,  
but a God who wants to live in relationship.

So yes, it’s a primitive story; a really, really old story.  
But, it was a *mind-blowing* new conception of a better, kinder,  
more peaceful God whose greatest intention for humanity is not  
violence but peace and love.

It’s primitive, but it’s also really, really progressive!”

## **V. ALL ABOUT COVENANT**

So, what’s different in *this* story from all the other stories of floods in the ancient world? And why does that matter to you? To me? Right here in the middle of Colorado, in the middle of the summer, in the middle of the morning?

This summer we are embarking on a journey into these really really old stories to see what’s different. What’s different in these stories *now* than when we learned them in Sunday School as a child? What’s different in these stories told in the Hebrew Bible from other cultures’ stories around them and why?

Why did they continue to have significance down through the ages for us in our Judao-Christian tradition, and how might they speak to us in our lives and times *today* in a different way than we’d ever considered before? For surely, we are living in a different kind of time as a church and a culture than ever before.

One new and different theme that emerges, as we’ve begun to explore, is that of a God who wants to be “in relationship”—in love, in fact!—with God’s people. To establish Covenant. A two-way relationship. Very different from the experiences people had had with gods before.

Covenant is not something that’s always understood. It’s not simply a “promise” or a symbol: the rainbow goes in the sky as a sign that God promises never to wipe out the world again in a flood, and that’s all there is to it. Every time we see a rainbow we remember something about a promise and a flood—way back in the day.

Covenant is at the core of our spiritual selves. It’s a multi-faceted relational bond, an agreement of the heart. A well-thought-out intentional commitment; a way of being in relationship with another or others.

On the Mission Trip we began our first Devotional gathering by learning what Covenant is, and creating one together. First on the list of things we would commit to as a group would be to “BE together. Be present. Come together around the table. At meals. At Devotion Times. At work time. When it was time to clean up, or work another several hours, or get on the boat or head for the van, or find each other for a group activity.

And to participate. Share life. Be intentional about getting to know each other. Intentional about not being just a “work team” but be in covenant. Even when we were tired, or tired of being together. (Yes, that happens on trips and in real life!)

## **VI. CHURCH IS COVENANT**

We covenant as a church congregation in much the same way. Even though we are not embarking on a trip, or forming a new group every week, in a sense we renew our covenant and our commitment *every* time we come together as a congregation. And that’s not just on Sundays!

Sometimes we need to be *reminded* that we have covenanted to come together. To be together. Come around the table. All kinds of tables. Not just the Communion Table, and not just the Potluck Table!

Sometimes we need to come together to talk about the hard stuff. The budget shortfalls, the conflicting ideas, styles, or ways of doing things. We covenant to agree to disagree and to let love cover all. Not cover-over, as in sweep under the rug, or cover in a cloak of “things we don’t talk about.” But, to know that love in community can contain and make room for all.

It’s easier—of course—when we face challenges, to find one or two and kibbutz behind the scenes. To triangulate. “Parking Lot conversations” they call those in every church across the land!

Sometimes we are tired. Or tired of doing more than our share. Sometimes in Alaska we wanted to head out for ice cream and

French fries *more* than we wanted to gather around the table for devotions, conversation and sharing our highs and lows at the end of the day.

But we kept then and we keep now—coming to the table. Because that’s what Jesus would do. Jesus just kept calling those disciples, wherever they wandered off to, to the Table. Kept sitting them down in a circle (except in the Last Supper paintings where they’re all sitting on the same side for some reason! Best angle?)

And when he *did*, he reminded them of Covenant. Their covenant with each other and God’s covenant with them. He reminded them that not only were they (and we) children of that Rainbow Covenant—that Promise that the floods of life would never, ever *consume* and overwhelm them—no matter what the storms of life brought.

But Jesus reminded them, too, that they are Beloved Children of the Creator God who has been wrapping us in love since the Dawn of Time. That our God is *not like* the angry, fickle gods they might have feared before. And, that Jesus came to show us this *new* understanding of God—called the New Covenant. TOO! Both and. All of the above.

Not to *replace* the Rainbow Covenant, but to expand and enhance it. To show that God is still speaking and promising and holding *us* in relationship even more than we understood before! It keeps getting bigger and broader and wider—that love of God. The consuming Covenant.

In Jesus’ coming to walk among us, he showed us “who God had been all along.” In his life and death and Resurrection he opened *us* up to a New Covenant—commitments on both sides and all sides. And that New Covenant is lived out most Christ-like in us when we come around the Table. Come together. Gather in his name. In his memory. As his Body here on earth.

When we share the highs and the lows. The celebrations and the struggles. When the coming together is easy and the conversation flows. When being present is *not* as easy and we'd rather be doing something else.

But the cup of blessing, the cup of life that we find here is a cup that never runs dry. A quench-thirster and bread for the journey far more satisfying than any ice cream and French fries at McDonald's!

So come. Come from the floods of life. The storms that threaten to overwhelm you. Come out of your safe little boat amidst the storm, you and your family and your animals!—and see that the sun is shining and the ground is firming up. Look up and see a rainbow and remember that *you* are in covenant with the Holy One and with one another. Let yourself be flooded, poured over, by the new, all-consuming covenant.

Come to the Table. Come and eat. Come and drink. Come and be filled with joy in abundance! Amen.