

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our living Lord and Savior!

SERMON THEME: "Unconditional Faith!"

SERMON TEXT: Genesis 6:5-9, 11-22 (Read first)

Dear Fellow Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

We talk a lot about faith. That's because faith is necessary for salvation, and for living a God-pleasing life! "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Without faith our prayers would not be answered. Our vision for the future would be obscured. Only by faith do our good works please our Father in heaven. And it is only by faith that anything humanly impossible can be accomplished; without faith miracles are unlikely to happen. As we meditate on the "Unconditional Faith" of Noah this morning, we do well to ask ourselves, "Does your faith and mine measure up to this supreme example of trust in God?"

Moses here in Genesis takes us back to an early time in the history of mankind, 2,500 years or more before the birth of our Savior, Jesus. The human race had multiplied greatly since Adam and Eve. There were many cities and developed areas in the mid-eastern region called Mesopotamia and beyond. We find a tragic state of affairs; no longer do people worship their Creator, nor even acknowledge Him as God! Sin is manifest; wickedness reigns. Violence is commonplace. Men of God have intermarried with pagan women, and as so often happens, took to their godless way of life rather than stay faithful to the one, true God. Society was so corrupt that wicked men, tyrants, were seen as heroes, and became men of renown (6:4)! Good had become bad, and bad had become good. Sound familiar?

But not every soul had rebelled against God. At any point in history there has always been a remnant, sometimes small, still faithful to the LORD God. Here we see it is Noah and his family of seven. Noah "was a righteous man, blameless" before God, a man "who walked with God", who had a close, personal relationship with Him. As happens to all of us who truly believe in the God of the Bible, Noah's faith was about to be put to a test, in his case to an extreme never before experienced by one

of God's own.

The LORD came to Noah and told him, that because "all flesh" had become so corrupted, because there was so much violence, He determined it was time for justice, time to destroy all that was evil, and sadly He's talking about every unbeliever on earth! How would He do this?

Not by a universal disease. Not by war. Not by the ravages of pestilence. No, perhaps symbolic of a great cleansing, a great flood would come; water would cover the entire earth, so deep that the highest mountain peak on earth would be under 20 feet of water! All people on land would die; all except Noah and his family. Most of the animal kingdom would die also, but God's plan provided for it to continue as well. God was starting over!

Now comes the test of faith. Noah was instructed to build an ark—a huge boat, or ship. God gave specific details on its construction. It was to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It was to be constructed of gopher wood, a hardwood similar to oak. There would be three decks covered by a roof. What must have gone through Noah's mind? Here he was in an arid country—today's Iraq--nowhere near a large body of water. The ark had to be built on dry land. It would weigh approximately 43,000 tons when completed! It would be impossible to move.

Where would so much wood come from? How could such a ship even be built? Each part of the keel, and most of the rest of the vessel would have to be hand-crafted to fit and be strong! All considered, the task appeared humanly impossible! Add to this the fact Noah was close to 500 years old when construction began! But examining our text closely, we find no hint of complaint or doubt on Noah's part. He simply had unquestioning faith! Later in Hebrews 11 we find this: "By faith Noah...took heed and constructed an ark...becoming an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith" (v. 7). God spoke. Noah believed and obeyed!

We can easily see why people who don't believe in God or the Bible would dismiss this account as a legend or myth. The mind and heart corrupted by sin is quick to reject the truthfulness of the story of Noah's ark because it is not reasonable; it is incompatible with reality and scientific thought. It is at best a story

that stirs the imagination of little children. It is foolish to believe such a tale!

In truth, it does not stand to reason! The entire account—the ark, the destruction of all life on earth by a universal flood, the gathering of two animals of every kind, the survival of eight humans and perhaps as many as 7,000 animals on a boat for a whole year—all of this is incomprehensible to the carnal mind! It is only by faith that we can accept this incredible story as true!

During the roughly 100 years it took Noah and many helpers to build the ark, we can only imagine how people must have made fun of the project—how Noah and his family were mocked and ridiculed. The project was so great, and seemingly ridiculous, that surely everyone in the region knew about it! Noah took advantage of his notoriety during this time, and according to Peter (2 Peter 2:5) became “a preacher (or herald) of righteousness”, calling people to repentance. When people gathered to watch this insane project, Noah preached to them! They ignored his message of course; his hearers turned out to be scoffers who had no intention of listening to the truth! After all, here was a “nut case” who was building a huge ship on dry land with no way to get it to float! For Noah, this had to be a time of persecution, a time when his faith was tested to the hilt, a time to depend on, and trust, his Father in heaven like few men have ever had to do!

But with God’s help Noah did the impossible; he built the ark! He preached righteousness through faith. He remained faithful to the covenant God had made with him—a covenant sealed by love and faith. He took in the animals and stored up provisions as God had told him to do. As we see in the closing words of our meditation, “Noah...did all that God Commanded him” (v. 22).

“Unconditional Faith!”. Noah didn’t question. He didn’t doubt. His faith did not waver in the least bit! His trust, his believing, was 100%. His faith was the kind Jesus spoke of when He told His disciples, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’, and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20). Not only did this man of God accomplish the impossible, but being righteous and blameless in God’s sight, had the kind of faith that saved his soul! Hopefully, every one of us here can begin to see the lesson

the Spirit is teaching us this morning! This is the kind of faith we should have; a living, unwavering faith, rooted in love, that will move us to trust in Jesus and do everything the Lord tells us to do, even if it seems impossible! "Unconditional Faith!"

Noah was 600 years old when the rains began. The deluge that followed lasted 40 days and nights until the entire earth was flooded. For a whole year the eight stayed aboard the ark, home to the life that would later multiply and again populate the earth! At the same time God was being just in destroying all wickedness, He was abounding in steadfast love! By His grace and mercy He not only saved those faithful to Him, but for the second time gave mankind a new start, a second opportunity to worship Him, live to glorify Him, and love all people according to His holy will! Would people now remain faithful to their Creator?

After the flood mankind again multiplied. And once again the devil tempted hearts to rebel against a holy God! It didn't take long for sin-blackened hearts to spread wickedness across the earth. The perversions of Sodom and Gomorrah once again brought destruction. God sent His prophets to the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel to call them to repentance, but they stubbornly refused, resulting in their destruction and the Babylonian captivity. Later, as the Holy Spirit had promised through the prophets, the Messiah came—Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. His mission was one of love, to take away the sins of the world. But true to history, sin-crazed men murdered God's Son; hung Him on a shameful cross. Today is no different. The human race, for the most part, has refused to believe what a loving God has done to save a rebellious mankind from their sins. The truth of the resurrection of Jesus is mocked. It has become wrong to call wrongdoing by its right name: SIN. And we have lived to see the Ten Commandments torn from public viewing, and those who speak of them are charged with a crime and punished.

There isn't going to be another flood. Something far worse is in store for the immoral, and the violent, the greedy and the false prophet. Isaiah spells it out: "The nation and kingdom which will not serve (God) will perish, and those nations will be utterly destroyed" (60:12). Today, wickedness and violence like that of Noah's time has again engulfed the world. But divine justice and the love of God in Christ Jesus WILL prevail!

Like Noah, our faith is being tested. Our testimony, our witness to the truth is subject to mockery and ridicule. Society forbids doing what God commands. The arks we build in Jesus' name are going to be seen as foolish, childish, not in harmony with science or worldly wisdom. To expose sin is to bring condemnation on oneself. To witness for Jesus in a school or in a work place is now a sure way to be expelled, fired, or wind up in court facing a lawsuit!

The point for us to remember this morning is that we need an "Unconditional Faith" like Noah's. Faith that does not doubt. Faith that seizes the promises of God and holds them close to the heart! Faith that trusts completely in the atoning work of Christ Jesus, believing that He paid the price of His life for every sin we ever committed! Our motivation for being like Noah comes from knowing our sins are truly forgiven, and that we are free to work, to give, to worship and serve, and enjoy each day to the fullest!

You and I won't be boarding any ark as wickedness increases, and be lifted above it all by rising flood waters. We have something far better, the water of holy Baptism to wash away our sins! And through faithful study of God's Word, daily repentance, and regular worship our Lord stands by us to protect us from the evil that is consuming society. There is another destruction coming, one that will again span the earth, but we who remain faithful to God, unwavering in our belief and obedience, WILL be saved!

Noah had not seen Jesus yet, and still his faith was unshakable! We have seen the manger and the open tomb! How much more should our faith prepare us for the time of tribulation now upon us?! Through Word and Sacrament God provides everything we need to weather any disaster that may befall all flesh! We have all that we need to ride out the storms of life! Above all we have the love of God in Christ Jesus! We have the love of one another! And we have that precious gift of the Spirit that gives us the "assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen"; our FAITH! God grant us a faith like Noah's!

**What better words could we hear than, "He was a righteous man (or woman); he walked with God!"
In Jesus' name, Amen.**

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The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will keep your hearts and minds through a living faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Rev. Donald P. Tonack