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## Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, September 6, 2009

### Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

#### *Never Again*

Genesis 8:1 – 9:17

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In the 1960s, Jim “Wrong Way” Marshall was a member of the “Purple People Eaters,” the fearsome defensive unit of the Minnesota Vikings football team. In a game played on October 25, 1964, Marshall scooped up a fumble and started racing toward the end zone for a touchdown. Unfortunately, it was toward the other team’s goal line. He ran for 66 yards and then jubilantly tossed the football into the stands. Marshall had no idea he had just scored a safety, meaning two points for the other team. In fact, his run was the longest safety in the history of pro football!

Generally speaking, memory is a good thing. It’s bad to forget. Some would say that life without memory is no life at all. Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action.

We are all about the Word this year. I hope you are personally studying God’s Word by using our *282-day Journey Through the Old Testament* devotional, online or the booklet. What? So What? Now What? Let’s remember together how the Word changes us. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”<sup>1</sup> The Word asserts that God is the author of life.

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ When the woman saw that the fruit was good for food, she took some and ate it. Then the eyes of both of them [Adam and Eve] were opened and they realized they were naked.”<sup>2</sup> Creation was recalcitrant and resistant to the purposes of the very one by whom and for whom the world exists. God

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<sup>1</sup>Genesis 1:1-2

<sup>2</sup>Genesis 3:1; 6-7

banished Adam and Eve from the garden and placed cherubim at the entrance of the garden to stop Adam and Eve from returning to the garden and eating from the tree of life. The Word asserts that sin is deadly, but God has a way out of the predicament.

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. “So the LORD said [to Noah], ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth. I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. So make yourself an ark.’”<sup>3</sup> Man was enamored with immortality. Man was a restless wanderer. There was only one bright spot left on earth. That bright spot was Noah. The Word asserts that there is a way for a new beginning.

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. “Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ‘I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you.’”<sup>4</sup> God’s intent for you and me is other than we deserve.

From a literary viewpoint, Genesis 6–9 forms an inverted V-shaped story. Everything in the story flows into or flows out of the point of the V. The tip of the inverted V is found in Genesis 8:1: “But God remembered Noah.” Notice the text doesn’t say, “God forgot about Noah.” This is the way of atheism or agnosticism, two worldviews that view God as irrelevant, absent or uninterested. Nor does the text say, “Noah remembered God.” That would be the way of religion, a system of life that puts all the pressure on us to stay close to God. Either of these two options forces us to live as spiritual orphans whose actions, beliefs, feelings and attitudes convey a deep lack of trust of God’s fatherly love and care. As spiritual orphans, we won’t live with radical, heartfelt and peaceful trust that God is our heavenly Father who cares for us. The good news of this story is: “God remembered Noah.”

The phrase “God remembers” occurs 73 times in the Bible. Every time God remembers, it means God will act for someone according to his covenant promise. When he remembers, God will surprise, stun, overwhelm and lavish unexpected and undeserved goodness and grace on his people. As soon as

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<sup>3</sup>Genesis 6:7; 13-14

<sup>4</sup>Genesis 9:8-10

God remembered Noah, the floodwaters started to subside. As soon as God remembered the rainbow, he blessed the earth. When God remembers, it's not just mental activity; it's redemptive activity.

God acts in goodness according to his covenant. What does "covenant" mean? A covenant is a never ending promise that will not be broken by the promise maker. A covenant is not contractual. In the Bible, God comes to a specific group of people (the Jews) and says: I want to be your God and I want you to be my people, forever. I will love you, provide for you and I ask that you would respond with love and obedience. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of that covenant made with Abraham. We will hear more about Abraham in two weeks.

The first time the word covenant is mentioned in the Bible is Genesis 6:18. God tells Noah, "But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark; you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you." Notice two things about a covenant: (1) A covenant is God's doing, not ours. God initiates the covenant with us, because we're actively fleeing from God. (2) A covenant is always about love. By bringing us into a covenant with him, God pours goodness on us and through us into the world. Due to his covenant with Noah, Noah becomes a blessing to his family and to all of creation.

Love changes us. That's what the covenant is all about. God keeps saying, "I love you. I want you. I'm here for you." God has a covenant with man. He will love us forever. Listen to this story of covenant love in action. On Valentine's Day, 1948, Robertson McQuilkin proposed to his sweetheart Muriel, and they married in August that same year. For the next three decades, they raised six children and served God together. The first sign their lives were about to change appeared in 1978. Muriel loved to tell stories, but one day she started repeating a story she had just finished minutes earlier. In 1981 doctors urged Robertson to consider the possibility of Alzheimer's disease. From that point on Robertson watched helplessly as his fun, creative and loving wife slowly faded away. By 1990 Robertson knew he needed to make a decision about his career. At the time, he was the president of Columbia College. His work needed him 100 percent, and Muriel needed him 100 percent. Robertson chose to resign. "People think it must be so difficult," he said, "but, even on the emotional side, I didn't look back with any regrets at all. I

enjoyed the new life.” On Valentine’s Day, 1995, Muriel suddenly woke up from her mental fog, smiled and spoke for the first time in months. She said, “Love, love, love.” Those were the last words Muriel ever said aloud. Muriel died on September 19, 2003. In a letter to friends, Robertson wrote, “For 55 years Muriel was flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone. So it’s like a ripping of my flesh and deeper; my very bones. But there is also profound gratitude. For ten years I’ve delighted in recalling happy memories. I still do. No regrets. I’m grateful.”<sup>5</sup> That, my friends, is a picture of God’s covenant love for us. He loves us not as a chore, but because it brings him great delight.

In Genesis 8:1-9:17, we learn that God remembered Noah. The flood waters had annihilated all of life outside the ark. Divine intervention began to reestablish order and life on earth. Where the waters had triumphed, they now retreated. The waters returned to their normal places, above the sky and below the earth. The ark rested on the mountains in the area called Ararat. After 150 days of flooding, it took another 150 days for the waters to recede.

The surface of the earth was dry. The raven, an unclean animal and the dove, a clean animal were the creatures used to determine the correct time for Noah to leave the ark. He left the ark with his family and all the animals. Noah built an altar to God and sacrificed a burnt offering. The aroma of the offering was pleasing to God. “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done.”<sup>6</sup> A covenant for redemption was made between God and man. God would never again use water as a means of judging humanity. God confirmed the covenant with Noah by declaring the rainbow to be the sign. “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between you and me.”<sup>7</sup> The sign was a rainbow. Who is the sign for? It’s not a memory aid for us. It’s a sign for God: “Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the covenant.”

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<sup>5</sup>Adapted from Robertson McQuilken’s, *A Promise Kept* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998).

<sup>6</sup>Genesis 8:21

<sup>7</sup>Genesis 9:12

Let me apply this to the Lord's Supper. I've always thought the bread and wine to be special reminders for us. But what if the bread and wine are reminders for God? What if just like the rainbow, the bread and wine are for God in that he remembers. God remembers the Covenant; the fulfilled Covenant in Jesus; Jesus' death for our sins; the power of the Holy Spirit that is available to you; how much he loves you; the original calling and destiny he has for your life. I believe that is the case and because of that truth, we remember what Jesus has accomplished for us and anticipate his second coming.

No matter how forgetful or unfaithful you have been the bread and wine work. We don't make them work; God does. God remembers and acts according to his covenant promise. It means God remembers us because he remembers us in Jesus. That's the Gospel. It means you and I are no longer spiritual orphans. And you and I remember we have a relationship with this covenant. By and through faith, you and I say "yes" to God's covenant promise. By faith, you and I turn from my self-sufficiency and grab on to God's promises in Jesus. By faith, you and I open our hearts to the Covenant as it is known in Jesus.

Matthew 16:13-20 and Romans 2:1-11 are instructive here. In Matthew, Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Like Noah, Peter was bold in his faith. He was bold, because he remembered that God remembered him. In Romans, Paul states that it is God's kindness that spares us from judgment. We know God's kindness in and through Jesus Christ. We know this to be true, because we know that God has remembered us. Philip Yancey writes, "A sacred view of life calls for simple trust that the One who created the human creature has our ultimate good in mind."<sup>8</sup>

The flood set Noah and his family free from the bondage of sin. The human race received a new start. No one can understand the covenant without Jesus and the Cross. His death was a substitution. Christ died for us; in our place. He died to set us free. Before he died, he gave his disciples bread and wine and he said: This is the bread; this is the cup of the Covenant. Because of the Covenant, we have

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<sup>8</sup>Philip Yancey, *Rumors Of Another World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 58.

been grafted into the story and the love of the covenant-making God. Remember that you have been remembered.

Allow the God of the covenant and everlasting love to love you. Let him remember you. Let him remember his covenant and act on your behalf.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, God is inviting you to know Christ and him crucified, to trust in him alone for your salvation. He is calling you to admit that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness, and that if you are to be saved, there is nothing else you can do except hold on to the cross of the crucified Jesus. If you have already come to the cross, do not let go! The crucified Christ is the only hope for this fallen world. As a follower of Jesus, your purpose is not to get people to conform to your lifestyle or to convince them to adopt your point of view. Your purpose is to point people to Jesus Christ and to his cross, which alone has the power to save.

God's intent for you is other than you deserve. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. The Word asserts that God remembers. Let us pray!

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