

**Gen. 8:1** God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a wind to blow across the earth, and the waters subsided. **2** The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up, and the rain from the sky was held back; **3** the waters then receded steadily from the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters diminished, **4** so that in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. **5** The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.

**Gen. 8:6** At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made **7** and sent out the raven; it went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. **8** Then he sent out the dove to see whether the waters had decreased from the surface of the ground. **9** But the dove could not find a resting place for its foot, and returned to him to the ark, for there was water over all the earth. So putting out his hand, he took it into the ark with him. **10** He waited another seven days, and again sent out the dove from the ark. **11** The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the waters had decreased on the earth. **12** He waited still another seven days and sent the dove forth; and it did not return to him any more.

When I chose these words for the message it was before all the terrible flooding in Germany and Belgium, and our own nation. In the last 30 years, big floods have been happening more and more. Our hearts should break for all of those who are victims of such a terrible thing. More about that when we pray.

I need you all to help me with something. I need you to close your eyes and be ready to raise your hands. No peeking please. In this month of July, please raise your hand if you read our church's newsletter. I will be the only one looking. OK. You can put your hands down and open your eyes. I mention the newsletter because I wrote something about how the Noah's Ark story is really powerful, and, that in many ways we had been riding on an ark during this thing we know as the pandemic. Just like Noah and the animals, we were safe. But we didn't know where we were going, we didn't know how long it was going to last, and just like the actual Ark in the story, we had no way to control how or where it would go. We were literally in that boat. Even though I would caution us that this

pandemic is not over, and it is still bad in much of the world, it seems true that many things are improving. After all, we are here together. That is far better than one year ago. WE have been ark riders. And we have gone through something big, so that we will probably never go back to things exactly as they were in 2019. I believe we are in fact in the place Noah was in when the waters receded. We do not take this story seriously enough. But after this terrible flood, things had to be rebuilt, redesigned, re-booted to use a modern phrase. So here we are, after the Flood. What do we do now?

I actually have some slides for us to see quickly, because Genesis gives us something that extends on into the Book of Exodus. Our lesson for this morning, Genesis 8, actually begins with one Hebrew word: *vai-yizkor*. *And he remembered*. Who remembered? God remembered. Very quickly notice other times when God remembers:

**Gen. 8:1** But God **remembered** Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided;

**Gen. 19:29** So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain, God **remembered** Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had settled.

**Gen. 30:22** Then God **remembered** Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb.

**Ex. 2:24** God heard their groaning, and God **remembered** his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**Ex. 6:5** I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have **remembered** my covenant.

Friends, it is always a good thing when God remembers. It is important that God remembered all sorts of things. But it might be even more important that we remember and consider all sorts of things as well. In fact we are told to remember the Sabbath Day. We are told to remember all sorts of things. God does in fact call us to use this power we have been given, to remember the past so that we can learn from our mistakes and grow and adapt. Frankly, we are not very good at remembering. We have very short memories, especially in our culture. But here we are, After the Flood, and God needs us *to remember...*

I would like us, right now, actively, intentionally, to start ***remembering***, and ***thinking*** about something that we really need to remember and consider as time moves forward from this point. Here we are with Noah, wondering what do we do now? What must be recalled? What must be remembered? It would be really easy for us to just plow ahead right now, and take each new day as they come. But we need to look at where we have been, which is difficult. As good church leaders would remind us, it is at times like these that we need to do three things. We need to ask three questions: Here they are: 1) what did we do that went well? What did we do that was successful? 2) we have to ask the opposite side, what did we do that maybe did not go so well? What maybe didn't work out the way we might have hoped? And finally, the really big one, 3) what have we learned from all this? What have we learned?

I look at question 1, which is needing us **TO REMEMBER**, and I smile because a lot of things actually went well. We were shut

down. And yet we only had 1 Sunday that was really lost. I remember being at home looking at Jill and our dogs and thinking *what are we going to do now?* We didn't know. But then by the next Sunday, Kristina Cupples had brought us into her world as a teacher, and we began to learn about this thing called ZOOM. I had started using it teaching at Hiram. But I didn't have any idea how it could be useful to our church. But little by little, we started working that out. Within a few months, many of our people were on Zoom on Sunday mornings to enjoy "Slipper Church," as I will always remember it! At the end we would visit with each other, and even show our dogs and cats! Just a bit later, we started using this for Bible Study groups. We are still using it now!

Other things happened as well. Jean Reichelderfer did wonderful work with her Member Care Committee. The church was closed, but they did their own mini newsletter, and they started getting copies of sermons out to people who could not do Zoom. That was a great thing. They sent out devotional materials for people. I know that later in the year, the Outreach folks were still able to make baskets and boxes of food to help hungry people, including the holiday lunch program. Our building was closed down. It was quiet and lonely. I was there. But we found a way to still be the church, without the use of our building.

We should ask ourselves the second question: What did not go as well as we might have hoped? For me, that is a question that all focuses on one area of concern: How do keep track of our people? How do we stay connected with our people? How do we keep people connected with their church? Sometimes it takes a crisis for anyone to actually be forced to sit down and think about how these

things happen. For people who had computers, we could do Zoom. But what if people didn't want to do that? We couldn't force them. What about people who didn't have internet and computers? How do we keep them connected to their church? How do we keep them connected to each other? Again, thank you to Jean for all her good work, which BTW never ends. To me at least, that was the biggest issue we had that was not positive, how to keep our people together through uncharted waters and an unknown future. This leads to question 3: What did we learn?

We really need to ask this. Our Bishop is begging us to ask this question. What did we learn. She had much to say about this at our computer Annual Conference at the end of June. I wrote down some of her points as she gave her Episcopal Address. She asked the question, *“When God is having us do a new thing, why would we want to go back to the old ways of doing things?”* Of course there is a joke about this, often referred to as the Seven Deadly Last Words of the Church. What are the Seven Deadly Words? **“WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE IT THAT WAY.”** Churches are very well known for not being good at change. They like to do things the way they were done 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 40 years ago. Our Bishop added *“We are swimming in some new waters now... we have had to deal with hard and big and bad things... we cannot just go back to the way things were.”*

We cannot just go back to the way things were. Many would encourage us right now, do not just forget about what we have endured. What did we learn from the last 16 months? What went well? What do we need to do better? I want to close by offering this thought: We have a chance, right now, to take a look under the

hood, to kick the tires, to see what works in our church, and what needs to work better. Because of that, I can promise you that I will have three special Sundays, one in August, one in September, and one in October where I will invite people to stay after church, anyone and everyone. I will lure you with coffee, cookies and snacks if I have to! We will walk down to our fellowship hall and I will do some re-booted presentations on materials that will still help us to strengthen our church. It is never too late to have these gatherings. If you love your church, I would invite you to give one extra hour per month, for 3 months, so that we can learn and talk together. One extra hour out of 720 hours in a month. When people join a church they take a vow to uphold that church by their prayers, their presence, their gifts and their service. Prayers, presence, gifts, and service. The dates will be posted soon.

Hopefully the waters will continue to recede. Hopefully there will not be a new surge of Covid in our area. This thing will eventually be gone. And we will learn new ways to be a stronger Church of Jesus Christ, and being a blessing to our community. We are blessed. Let's be a blessing. AMEN.