

“God Adapted” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
February 18, 2018 First Sunday in Lent  
Genesis 9:8-17

Let us pray: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

The story of Noah and the flood. It's one of those Bible stories you probably heard as a child about God's love for the animals of the earth and the origin of the rainbow. Many of us have preserved that sweet story of the animals entering the ark two by two with the colorful rainbow overhead. Many of us still think of God's love for God's creation when we see a rainbow – and that's a good thing.

There's another interpretation of the story that's definitely not for children. This interpretation portrays God as so angered by human rebellion that God floods the whole earth, destroying nearly everything in a divine rage. Here is a God you'd want nothing to do with, a God of wrath who strikes down sinners.

Let's push aside our individual memories of this story and the ideas about God that the story brings to your mind. Consider instead that this story is about an unconditionally loving God who is adapting to God's creation and calling us back to the harmony that God intended for God's creation.

There are some things in this story that may not be so obvious to us. First, God exhibits human characteristics, which I will detail in a moment. Second, God speaks directly to Noah. There's no prophet delivering a message.

How is God's unconditional love revealed in this story? Let's go back to chapter 6 of Genesis where we read in verses 5 and 6: **The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.**

Why did I say earlier that God was an unconditionally loving God? God's response to the wickedness of humanity is not revenge but being grieved to his heart. God's heart, in contrast to the wickedness of humankind's heart, is grieved. God is pained by the brokenness of creation. The flood is not sent as revenge but sent out of God's pain in the brokenness of God's creation. There is no anger, divine regret yes, but no anger in this story.

Perhaps the closest human story you and I can relate to about how God may feel is the feelings of a parent with the drug-addicted child, especially when the parent practices tough love. The parent loves the child very much but is grieved at the child's behavior. The action the parent takes with the intent of helping the child may seem unloving in some folk's eyes, yet those actions are taken out of love – not out of anger.

God does indeed care for God's creation. This verse from the story reveals to us that God is putting the rainbow in the sky not only for our benefit, but also for God's. Verse

**15: I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.** God will remember his covenant by looking at the rainbow.

What about this covenant? It's pretty much a one-sided agreement that reveals God's unconditional love for God's creation. Verse 9 & 10: **"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark."** What is our side of the agreement? This scripture doesn't tell us we have a responsibility. The covenant is one-side. God's gift to us.

This covenant isn't for a portion of humanity, but it is for all humanity. This quote from Wil Gafney makes that quite clear (Workingpreacher.com, February 18, 2018 commentary) what God means by **every living creature**. "The covenant between God and all flesh is between God and every girl, woman, boy, man, and intersex person, every lesbian, gay man, bisexual and transgender person, every atheist, agnostic and religious person, every Muslim, Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu, Wiccan and pagan person, every person of ability and perceived limitations, every person of any nationality, ethnicity or racial construction or category, and even includes those who defy and explode categories."

We tend to focus on the human side of creation. However, God's unconditional love is for all of God's creation. God loves and cares for **every living creature, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth** and, I believe, we should too. Consider how you can cooperate with God by caring for God's creation and by not grieving God's heart with our behavior.

In my travels to El Salvador, I saw how folks there were practicing organic farming. They were not using genetically altered seeds but were planting the crops their ancestors had planted and were saving the seeds from year to year. They were doing their best to live in harmony with nature. Are you?

One more point about this covenant. God is actually placing a self-limiting condition on God's self. God rules out wiping God's creation off the face of the earth. God keeps the future open for us when our behavior threatens our relationship with God.

The God revealed in the story of Noah is adaptable, caring and willing to accept hurt to keep hope alive. For those who may be challenged by that comment, consider that Noah's story also shows an unchanging God, a God not willing to give up on creation. God is not an objective judge, but a lover grieved to the heart at our betrayal, yet still seeking reconciliation.

And that is indeed good news.