

*After the flood, "The waters had all drained off and the ground was dry again when God hung a rainbow in the sky to remind him he'd promised "that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood" (Genesis 9:11).*

*The way God explained it to Noah, "I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature that is upon the earth" (9:13).*

*In one way, then, it gave Noah a nice warm feeling to see the rainbow up there, but in another way it gave him an uneasy twinge.*

*If God needed the rainbow as a reminder, he thought, that could mean that, if someday God didn't happen to look in the right direction or had something else on his mind, God might forget God's promise and the heavy drops would start pattering down on the roof a second time.*

*Noah could never forget the first time-how little by little the waters had risen, first just spreading in over the kitchen linoleum and trickling down the cellar stairs,*

*but eventually floating newspapers and family photographs off tables and peeling wallpaper off walls until people were driven to the rooftops,*

*where they sat wrapped in blankets with their transistor radios on their laps looking up for a break in the clouds and reassuring each other that this must be the clearing shower at last.*

*He remembered the animals he'd had to leave behind-the old sow with her flaxen lashes squealing on top of a hen house as the ripples lapped at her hooves,*

*the elephants awash up to their hips,*

*a marmalade cat with one ragged ear clinging to a TV aerial as a pair of parakeets in a wicker cage floated by over what had once been the elementary school gym.*

*He also remembered the endless days in the ark-the miserable food, the seasickness, the smells.*

*When the downpour finally stopped, he sent birds out to see if they could find any dry land anywhere, and he remembered watching them fly away until they were no bigger than flyspecks on a windowpane,*

*remembered the feeling in his stomach when they finally flew back having found no place to roost.*

*He remembered especially one of the doves and how, when he saw it returning, he had reached out over the rail, and it had landed on the calluses of his upturned palm.*

*With his eyes closed and tears on his cheeks, he had touched his lips to its feathers, and as he felt the panic of this bird's heart, it had seemed to him that the whole world was just as fragile and as doomed.*

*But then, after weeks, another dove came back with a sprig of olive in its beak, and the tops of the mountains began to reappear out of the watery waste, and now at last the great, glittering rainbow arched above him, and the great promise echoed in his ears.*

*"Never again," God had said, and Noah clung on to those words like a raft in a high sea.*

*With the rainbow tied around his little finger to jog his memory, surely God would never forget what he'd said.*

*No matter what new meanness people might think up, surely the terrible thing would never happen again.*

*As an expert in hoping against hope, the old sailor told himself that the worst was over and that as sure as God made little green apples, a new, green world would blossom up out of the sodden wreckage of the old" (Buechner, Frederick. "Peculiar Treasures.")*

So, what you just heard was an interpretation of the Noah story by the famous theological writer, Frederick Buechner.

And so continues our summer sermon series of "Four Stories of Faith."

The first Sunday we heard about a young boy named Samuel, last week we heard about an enterprising woman named Rahab, and today, we hear about man whom you may have heard of, named Noah.

I said that I wanted to highlight faithful people of all ages, and Samuel was 11 years old, so I thought we should focus on someone who was just a bit older as well.

The Bible tells us that in this story, Noah is 600 years old, so, yes, just a little bit older than Samuel.

But one thing I want to note about Noah, which was true for Samuel and Rahab too, is that he was no one special.

Sure, he was faithful, but so were lots of people.

It is never made clear to us why God chose Noah and his family to survive the flood.

We don't know what Noah did during his life, which earned him this honor.

We do, however, know something about Noah's character.

We know that just by choosing him, God is showing that Noah is a faithful person who trusts God.

God obviously wouldn't pick someone to be responsible for the perpetuation of humanity who was not faithful and trusting.

Now, remembering that this comes from the Hebrew Bible,

*"it was said by certain rabbis that every human being possessed a "yetzer tov and a yetzer ra," that is "a good inclination and a bad inclination."*

This comes from Genesis 6:5, which says, *"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."*

The inclination that is mentioned, this is the one that the rabbis refer to,

the good inclination and bad inclination,

and it was believed that these two basic human traits were constantly at war with each other for the soul of each human.

I think that maybe God chose Noah, in part, because he followed his good inclination much more than he gave into his bad inclination.

We each have this battle within us, good versus evil.

Maybe Noah was good more often than he was evil, maybe he was good more often than anyone else, which is why God chose him and wiped out everyone else, because they were too evil.

Or, maybe the earth had plenty of good and faithful people, but God knew that Noah would continue to trust God during and after the flood.

That's one thing that amazes me about Noah and why I chose to feature him as one of our faithful people, because even during this world-destroying, cataclysmic event, Noah never loses faith.

He never throws himself overboard, he never curses God.

He sticks it out, even though he doesn't know how long the flood is going to last.

Even though he sent a dove out and it comes back because it can't find a dry place to land.

Noah keeps the faith in that boat which was probably becoming increasingly unpleasant everyday.

As someone who was on a small boat with my family for 4 days that was not full of animals, I can only imagine how long 40 days felt for Noah and his family.

But he never lost his faith.

It's easy to keep the faith when all is well and we have nothing to complain about, but maybe God picked Noah because God knew Noah would remain faithful even after the crap hit the fan, even after he saw the animals and the people drown.

That's the miracle of this story, the whole flood piece aside.

The fact that Noah continued to trust God even amidst that calamity is incredible and it's something I doubt I could emulate.

After I saw all those people perish, I probably would have wanted to perish with them.

But even though he doesn't know the whole story, even though he doesn't know how it's going to end or how long the misery is going to last, Noah continues to trust.

That's a lesson for all of us to take to heart.

When things are miserable and we are suffering, and we don't know how long it will last or when the rains will let up or when we will see the rainbow in the sky,

the story of Noah challenges us to trust God, everyday, even when we don't want to, even when we're hanging on by the skin of our teeth.

Hang on, one more day.

Eventually the clouds will break.

Eventually the sun will shine again.

Eventually all will calm down in our world and we will remember how to treat each other once again.

Eventually.

And when that day comes, we will express the same gratitude Noah showed God.

After the floodwater receded, Noah didn't just say, "thanks God," and go on his merry way.

After all the animals were safely off the ark, he built an altar to God to offer his thanks and gratitude.

And it was after God realized what Noah had done that God promised to never again curse the ground because of humankind or to destroy the living creatures the way God had done.

There is no excuse for us not to remain faithful to God, everyday, no matter what challenges we face.

And may we have the humility to say "thank you," as well,

because whether or not God notices our gratitude, it can certainly change us for the better.

Amen.