

Sept 3, 2025

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

Important Work

Excerpts from The Story of Noah, Genesis 6:1 - 8:22

“People began to multiply on the face of the earth...the Lord saw that human wickedness was great. The Lord was sorry to have made humankind. ‘I will blot them out from the face of the earth’ said the Lord. ‘People and animals with them.’ But one human, Noah, found favor in the sight of the Lord. ‘Make yourself an ark...’ the Lord said to Noah, (and then gave Noah all the dimensions and directions for building the ark). Bring inside, you and all your immediate family and a male and female of every kind of living thing. And Noah did all that God had commanded. And God caused it to rain and the flood continued for forty days and forty nights. And all flesh was blotted out. Finally, God made a wind blow and the waters gradually receded. Then Noah opened the ark window and sent out a raven and a dove to find dry land. The dove could not find any, so Noah waited another 7 days. Then he sent the dove out again, and it returned with an olive branch. Then God said to Noah, ‘God out of the ark; you, your whole family and every living creature.’ Then Noah built an altar and offered a burnt offering of every clean kind of bird. The odor was pleasing to God who said, ‘Never again will I curse the earth because of humankind, nor destroy every creature...”

What do Labor Day and Sabbath Day have in common?
They are both remedies for the spiritual malady,
“I’m too busy”.

“Where was I when my little girl grew up?
I was too busy.”

“I can’t make it to watch your soccer game,
I’m too busy.”

“Well have to skip our anniversary.
I’m too busy.”

“This stress is killing me. I’m too busy.”

And yet, being BUSY is a source of great pride for many.
Many people NEED to feel busy.

Many “Haves” judge the “Have Nots” because
they aren’t busy enough.

Retirees tell me over & over, with a great big smile,
“I’ve never been so busy.”

Many Americans define their self-worth by
“Being busy”.

As this is a service of worship -
in other words, a celebration of worth;
it is worth asking,

“How do you gage the value of your busy-ness?
How important is your work?”

Most people think their work is important

Important for the happiness it brings.
Or important to their bank account?
Or important to the well-being of your family?
Some think their fun is their work.

Some gage the importance of their work
on the well-being of society?
(For that reason we praise Teachers this time of year.)

More and more we are learning
to gage the importance of our work
on the well-being of our planet?

As Christians we are called to base our work
on importance to the Kingdom of God,
or how it reflects the life of Jesus.

How do YOU gage the importance of your work?

The story of Noah gives us a glaring measure of work
as holy as any there is.

It gives us an ultimate and all encompassing measure
as ever there is,

because its bottom-line is about

THE SURVIVAL OF ALL LIFE !

As the story unfolds, 3 elements pop out,
each pointing to what humanity's
most important work should be.

The 1st element is the basic theme of the story itself.
A Worldwide Flood.

Despite all those intriguing TV shows on
The Discovery Channel about archeological digs
near Mt. Ararat finding ark-like remains,
The bible never meant this story to be HISTORY
in the strictest sense.

Much more it was meant to be
EXISTENTIAL THEOLOGY.

The flood is a symbol for universal threat;
so universal that numerous religions
in addition to Judaism and Christianity
also have global flood stories.

The flood means universal threat, and Noah's ark
means global salvation.

One of the key jobs of any religion worth its salt
is to offer a perspective on **global salvation.**

If your religion is just about your personal salvation -
then it is too self-centered.

If its about worshiping a single person,
then it's too exclusive.

Indeed, the faith of Jesus,
was never about personal salvation or exclusive religion.
He was always about universal salvation.

A 2nd element are all those numbers.
So many numbers in the Noah story,
but they are far more than just numbers, they are
existential messages.

Take all those measurements which God gave Noah
for building the ark:

300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, 30 cubits high.

No wooden ship built in history ever came close
to the size of Noah's ark.

Indeed, engineers wonder if a wooden vessel
could ever be that large and actually sail.

But engineering matters far less
than the meaning of those measurements.

The "cubit".

A cubit represented the length of an average arm
from the elbow - to the tip of the longest finger.

The cubit was a unit of work as much as a number,
and that huge number of cubits

speaks to the amount of work it took to build the ark.

It was a numerical way of saying,

the work of saving the world takes a lifetime.

Combine those numbers to “*40 days and 40 nights*”.

Similar to the 7 Days of Creation story,
“*40 days and 40 nights*” isn’t actual a measure of
chronological time - it is a statement of existential time.
It means a long and significant time -
indeed, so significant that it defines a person.

Celtic spirituality would call this Soul-time.
When Moses led the Israelites 40 years in the desert,
it was the time that defined the soul of the Israelites.

When Elijah traveled 40 days and 40 nights to Judah,
it meant the time that defined him as a prophet.

When Jesus faced the Tempter 40 days in the wilderness,
it was that time for Jesus that defined him.
That time, like the old advertizement for Timex watches,
“that kept on ticking despite a licking”

This morning, when we dedicated dear Raylon & Henry,
we dedicated them to a journey of faith
their version of 40 days and 40 nights.

All the numerology
in the story of Noah and The Great Flood,
basically speaks to the totality of life's most important
work.

It takes a life time. And it takes our everything.

So, the 1st element of the Noah story
speaks of the universality
of our most important work.

And the 2nd element speaks to the totality
of our most important work.

The 3rd and final element speaks to the morality
of our most important work.

The survival of all life depends upon us realizing,
WE ALL LIVE IN THE SAME BOAT.

Isn't it interesting
that all the sin, evil and violence is redeemed
by Noah building an ark
and putting all living creatures, male and female, inside
to ride out a flood of nature?

Why didn't God just wave a magic wand to get rid of sin?
Why wasn't this universal destruction
similar to universal creation?

Remember earlier in the book of Genesis,
God convened a heavenly council
and brain-stormed with plural gods, saying
*'Let us make humankind in our image;
according to our likeness...
so God created humankind in godly image -
male and female God created them.'*

In the Noah story, there's no magic solution.
There's no intervention of the gods.
There's only the power of Mother Nature to teach
human beings what their most important work
was, is and always shall be:
The earthly salvation of life
depends upon all of us
grasping the most important moral goal:
**WE ALL MUST LEARN TO LIVE
IN THE SAME BOAT.**

This, my fellow human-beings
is our most important work.
There are no days off from this work.
There is no retirement from this work.
This work takes every bit of our effort
every day of our lives, for a lifetime.
And I just pray we have the chronological time
to get it right!

Amen.

Prayer of Pastoral Care Sunday, September 3, 2023

Psalm 26 calls to us: *“Sing a song of thanksgiving. Declare God’s wondrous deeds. For the Lord dwells among the people; the glory of God abides with us.”*

Ps 26: 7-8 adapt, Call to Worship, Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion Yr. A, Vol.2, p.143

In peace, let us pray to God, saying,

Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the church of Jesus Christ. Bless the church, deliver it from evil, and make it holy in every way, that all people may see the light of your salvation and wholeness through the witness of your faithful servants. Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our pastors, teachers, and all ministers, clergy and lay. Arouse the leaders of your church to prophetic witness; we pray for the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson our new General Minister and President, and for all staff and mission personnel around the world of the United Church of Christ. Help them and us to proclaim your justice fearlessly, to embody your righteousness sincerely, and to practice your mercy selflessly. Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the world and for its leaders. Uphold the leaders of governments; we pray for our president Joe Biden, our governor Phil Scott, and all leaders in our nation, state, and local communities. Give them strength to uphold the rule of law and serve all people. We hold in prayer the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea. We lament the war there already lasting over two years,

the accompanying scourge of famine, the displacement and violence against women, the extrajudicial killings and the 600,000 deaths due to starvation and utter poverty that are reported by humanitarian agencies.

Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the people and leadership in Ukraine and in Russia, and in other places of war that justice and peace may prevail. When we pray “Give us our daily bread” help us to connect to the millions who are starving in Haiti and across parts of Africa. Help us to work for the more equitable distribution of food for all in need.

Merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

On this Labor Day Sunday, we pray for all who do the work of our families, our communities and nation. We lift before you those on this church’s immediate concerns list.

These prayers we offer through Christ by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

HYMN # 577 Nearer, My God, to Thee

OFFERING The apostle Paul encourages us: do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. In service to this loving Lord, let us return to God a portion of the bounty God has provided.

***DOXOLOGY**

***PRAYER** Almighty God, receive these gifts that we offer with grateful hearts, and use us for your ministry in the world. Amen.

COMMUNION HYMN #425 (v.1) Let Us Break Bread Together