

“Be Open, Have Courage, and Hold On”

God said, “I will wipe this human race that I have created from the face of the earth — I am sorry I ever made them.”  
Those are perhaps the saddest words in all of scripture,  
for they carry not just sorrow, but anger and grief and despair – and maybe even a sense of failure.

Those dark emotions hardly match up with what we usually associate with this text,  
as we read the story to children, give them Noah and the Ark toys,  
and perhaps even decorate their rooms with the happy family and their floating zoo.  
But except in the way we tell scary fairy tales to children, this is anything but a children’s story.  
It’s a story of sin and sorrow, of terror and torment, of death and destruction

Before following through with this intention to “unmake” creation, however, God has second thoughts.  
After all, in the beginning everything God had created was “good”, and human beings were even “very good”.  
So instead of scrapping the first draft and going with a whole new design,  
God decides that maybe there is still a chance of salvaging the original.  
Instead of throwing all the babies out into the bathwater, God decides to keep one family – Noah’s.

Now whether or not you believe that there was actually a flood that covered the entire known world,  
there is deep truth in this story, even if it is not literal truth,  
and specifically there are three lessons I believe that we can draw from it.

First we need to **be open**.

God told Noah, who most likely lived in the desert far from any large body of water, to build an Ark, a giant boat.  
Now just think about what that would mean for a moment if you were Noah.

What would you think?

It would seem to be absolutely absurd, wouldn’t it?

Wouldn’t you be tempted to just dismiss it?

I mean it was such an out-of-the-box idea, about as far outside your comfort zone as you could get –  
and how could you even be sure you had heard God correctly?

So what that meant was that Noah had to have an incredibly open mind in order to let in God’s vision for him.

And that’s the first lesson for us in this story, we need to **be open**.

(What’s the first lesson? we need to **be open**.)

The second thing we need is to **have courage** to do what God tells us to do.

Imagine it’s you God has told to build the boat.

You’d be doing something you had never done before.

You’d have to quit many, if not all, of the other things you used to do (like grow your food)  
in order to commit the time to such a project.

You’re the only one to whom God has spoken, so it’s only your word that this is from God.

Everyone, including the members of your family, think you are absolutely out of your mind.

It certainly would not be easy to follow God’s call. It would take great courage

It’s difficult because we all like to stay within our comfort zone,

we crave the familiar, even when the familiar is not good for us.

We hang onto our bad habits; we repeat the same mistakes; we haven’t the courage to confront our secret sins.

But the truth is God wants so much more for us than we can ever ask or imagine,

and God knows what things will keep us trapped in negative patterns

of anxiety and depression, of dissatisfaction and frustration, of anger and fear,

and what things will ultimately bring us the greatest joy.

God knows what we need, and God is just waiting to bless us with whatever that is,

but we must **have courage** to follow where God leads.

(What’s the first lesson? we need to **be open**. What’s the second lesson? we need to **have courage**.)

And the third thing we need to do is to **hold on**.

Because you see, while the jibes and catcalls from his neighbors had been difficult to withstand,  
it gets even harder for Noah,  
as the storm clouds roll,  
as the pelting rain becomes torrential,  
and the waves beat against the ark,  
and it goes on and on and on and on, and it seems as if it will never, ever stop.

And all Noah can do is to **hold on** —

hold on to the vision God had given him, hold on to the faith that had gotten him this far,  
and hold on to the promise that God was still at work to accomplish God's will.

(So what's the first lesson? we need to **be open**.

What's the second lesson? we need to **have courage**.

And the third lesson? we need to **hold on**.)

And we need to do these things both in our life together and in our lives apart.

As a congregation, Salem is actively working to discern what it is that God has in mind for us.

Your Council,

the Sustainability Task Force,

the Source and Reflection LIGHT teams, and other leaders

are trying very hard to be open to what God is calling us to do.

We need each one of you to do the same.

Each one of us needs to be open to the vision, the plan God has in mind for us.

These principles apply to our life together, but they also apply to each of our own lives.

The stresses and strains of modern life leave many of us feeling

inadequate, imperfect, isolated, and vulnerable.

Many people feel judged, out of place in life, and worried about family relationships.

They experience anxiety, anger, sadness, and guilt, and often wonder if they're crazy.

People struggle with feeling they're not capable

and worry that one day soon everyone will figure out that they're a failure.

And worst of all, many people feel they are the only ones feeling such things.

I know what many of you are struggling with

and I'm sure that's just the surface of all the brokenness that exists in each of our lives.

The good news is that God has the power and the love to heal it all,

but God won't do it without our cooperation.

Whether or not the story of Noah is literally true, the truth is

that in order for us to move forward into God's future,

in order for us to find the way, the truth and the life, and

in order to experience the abundant life Jesus promised,

we must **be open, have courage, and hold on**.

One more time: what must we do?

**be open, have courage, and hold on. Amen**