

In 1903, an embankment dam was constructed by an irrigation company which was called the Lawn Lake Dam. The area eventually became part of Rocky Mountain National Park when it was created in 1915. The reservoir was almost 11,000 feet elevation and stored a maximum of 817 acre feet of water. An outlet pipe was used for releases, but due to its high elevation, inspections were relatively infrequent. During the early morning hours of July 15, 1982, all was peaceful and serene below Lawn Lake and Estes Park. Some time between 5 and 6 am, its believed that water began percolating through a failed outlet valve eroding the earth-filled dam and causing it to collapse. The dam, holding 30 million cubic feet of water was suddenly released, emptying the lake in roughly half an hour. The water roared down the mountain catching campers at several campgrounds in surprise. A garbage truck driver saw the flood and notified emergency response. Luckily only 3 campers were killed, but the water also topped Cascade Dam which also collapsed and then rushed into Estes Park and into the Big Thompson River. 90% of the businesses in Estes Park sustained damage, homes were destroyed and damages totaled \$31 million. It was a devastating disaster, caused by the chaos of water, leading to death and destruction in its wake. I'll come back to this story, but now lets look at our scripture.

First a caveat. No one really knows what happened at the start of the world or what God was actually thinking during the times of Adam and Noah, but like many things in the Bible, there are some possible theories that corroborate the story. However, many stories were written to teach us something about ourselves and our relationship with God and others. It is from those concepts and my sources that this sermon is written.

The story of the flood in our scripture today is believed to have taken place in an area called Mesopotamia which most historians recognize as the birthplace of civilization. This is the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which flow into the Persian Gulf and where it is believed that humanity multiplied and expanded after Eden. There are only a few chapters between Adam and Noah

and no one knows how many years separated the two, but historians have evidence that it could have been several centuries. No matter how long, the scripture relays that humanity had had enough time to thoroughly sadden God. God was apparently sorry that he had made humanity, but not necessarily angry. God just wanted a do over and he entrusted Noah with the duty of re-populating the world, but also of managing the hate and chaotic things that had damaged humanity previously. After God wiped out the apparent evil in the world, God then entrusted human affairs back to humans.

Often, parents decorate a new baby's room with the Noah's Ark theme because there are animals and rainbows and references to new beginnings. However, we can't forget about the symbolism of the water. In the Bible, there are multiple stories that involve the chaos of water, but also that same water representing new beginnings. God's parting of the angry appearing Red Sea helped to lead the Israelites away from the Egyptians, the parting of the Jordan River by Joshua as he led the Israelites into the promised land, the calming of the raging sea by Jesus in today's gospel which allowed the disciples to see Jesus in a new way, and through our own baptismal waters, which welcome us as a child of God. Today, we also have instances of water creating chaos in the world. There have been hurricanes such as Katrina, The Asian Tsunami of 2004, the major flooding in Nebraska in 2019. They are devastating when they occur as possessions are lost or damaged, lives are taken, the ground or waterways are changed by the raging waters. Hope for one's own or community's future, often seems lost, but God wants us to know that God is always present with us just as God remained with Noah and his family. Re-birth of the land or re-creation of a life may be difficult and be a "complete do-over", but God wants us to flourish.

When God first began to create the heavens and earth, there was "complete chaos." There was a deep darkness, but then "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters and there was light. The word for wind is also the same for spirit and breath in Hebrew and mostly the same in Greek. God had

begun the first creation by blowing the Spirit over the earth and said it was very good. But, then sin entered the world and it didn't take long for hateful, murderous ways to develop. Sin will always be present, but there is the possibility of putting boundaries on it. God has tried to put boundaries on our sin by the gift of the Ten Commandments, but as we have heard over the past few weeks, those are hard to uphold and often easily broken. We see the commandments being broken every day, we put our own individuality first before the good of the community, we worship false Gods, we proclaim hate towards those who think different than we do, we judge others on their appearance, choices, or situation. We know that God is always present with us even in the chaos of our lives. God's spirit is in us and flows through us. Just as God blew the Spirit over the earth and said it was very good, we too can sense God's spirit in our lives, use that to blow in and through us, to create things that are "very good and within life giving boundaries. It's hard though. It's so hard to not get sucked into the sin of the world. We are constantly bombarded by negativity on the news and social media. We don't spend enough time in contemplation and silence, listening for God. How many of us lead our lives really saying, "What would Jesus do?" God was watching his creation in Noah's time and God continues to watch us today. One of my favorite songs is "From a Distance, by Bette Medler. Two verses are: From a distance, we all have enough and no one is in need, and there are no guns, no bombs, and no disease, no hungry mouths to feed. From a distance, we are instruments marching in a common band, playing songs of hope, playing songs of peace, they're the songs of every man. The chorus is: And God is watching us, God is watching us, God is watching us, from a distance. How is God really seeing us right now?

So are we doomed? Should we just give up? Too much hate? Too much divide? Too much judgment? No, this is life, but we can make conscious choices to listen to the spirit inside of us.

Today, we start our Adult Education with the theme of How to have difficult conversations. How can

we have good healthy dialogue with others who have differing points of view on family issues, church issues, or the big one, politics.

The story of the flood and the promise given to Noah is yet another example of death and resurrection detailed in the Bible. The theme is continually played out in our lives. My dad was a farmer and his doctor said he loved taking care of farmers as they understood this concept of death and resurrection. Things die, . . . things are reborn, re-created. God doesn't expect us to be perfect, but instead of living in a time when all things and people are evil, we can try to restrain hate and create love.

The plain of Mesopotamia has been described as an alluvial plain. It is flat and fertile formed by thousands of years of sediment deposits from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The land below the Lawn Lake in Colorado that I mentioned at the start was recreated by the boulders and debris that washed down the mountain into the low lying plain below. This is now what they call the Alluvial Fan- a triangle or fan shaped deposit of that debris. You can view the fan shaped base along the road higher up the mountain and really see it's magnitude expanding over 40 acres. You can now walk around the bottom of the fan. Trees and vegetation have grown up in the midst of the boulders which you can climb on, walk around, or just sit and observe. It is a beautiful quiet spot for contemplation as there is now a gentle stream flowing through. Chaos did occur, the land and others had to adjust, but now there is beauty. When the chaos enters your life, may we all bathe in God's loving presence moving in and through us, to not be afraid of what might be lost, but to look forward to re-birth and re-creation. Look towards the rainbow.