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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Proper 12, Series B
Saturday, July 24th, 2021
Sunday, July 25th, 2021

Sermon: “Never Again”
Texts: Genesis 9:8-17

Focus: God will never again destroy the world through a flood.

Function: The Lord saves us from our sins through the cross and the flood of Baptism.

Structure: Story-Framed

Locus: “This baptizing with water... indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (SC, Fourth Part on Baptism).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. I am a big fan of science fiction movies, particularly the subgenre of post-apocalyptic worlds. You know the kind, the ones that tell the story of a lone ranger or a tiny band of survivors trying to eke it out *after* the end of the world. There are probably a dozen different types of disasters made popular by these films, including various subgenres of nuclear holocaust, zombies, global warming, robots, alien invasion, and global pandemic. They range from humor to horror and from silly to sublime.

Yet one film in particular stands out for me. 26 years ago this summer, *Waterworld* (1995, PG-13) was released in theatres, starring Kevin Costner as a lone Mariner struggling to survive in a world in which global warming has caused the polar ice caps to melt completely, covering the entire face of the world with water (thus, *Waterworld*). After he rescues two slaves from a pirate ship (the *Exxon Valdez*), the marauders harry him unceasingly to recapture their human cargo. As they say, no good deed goes unpunished. I don't want to ruin the plot for you. The movie is so bad that it's good—imagine a cross of *Mad Max* and Noah's ark. And while the

movie is entertaining despite the terrible acting and implausible storyline, one major problem remains: a disaster like *Waterworld* could never happen. Why not? Because God says so.

“Never again!” declares God in our Old Testament lesson after the end of the greatest apocalyptic event in all of human history: the Great Flood of Noah. In the days before the Flood, God was sorry that he ever made human beings. “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (Gen. 6:5-6). That’s a very damning statement: every intention of the human heart is “*only evil continually.*” If you’re one of those divine-spark-find-the-light-within-you kind of people, this statement certainly puts an end to that thought!

So God decided to start over. He would send a great Flood to destroy all life on earth. “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8). Noah was “a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God” (v. 9). God decided to rescue Noah and his family—and some of the animals, as well. So the LORD God, Yahweh, commanded Noah to build an ark—a great ship of extraordinary size such as the world had never seen. Noah was told to gather pairs of every kind of animal on earth, and seven pairs of every “clean” animal suitable for sacrifice. (*Aside:* Please note that “kinds” were probably more akin to *genus* than *species* in our modern-day, scientific taxonomy of the animal kingdom. You can talk to Don Gilbreath for more information about that).

For many years Noah and his family labored to build the ark. We can only imagine the ridicule they must have received from their friends and neighbors during their construction project in the drydock. Yet Noah, being a righteous man, had compassion on his unbelieving neighbors. St. Peter calls him a “herald of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5), for Noah preached the

Word of God to try to persuade them to repent and be saved. As Jesus tells us, they just went on with their merry lives, “eating and drinking and marrying... until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:27).¹ Tragically, the only people who believed Noah were his wife, three sons, and their wives. Everybody else died.

Famously, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. There was so much water that even the highest mountain peaks were covered by about 20 feet of water. And even after the rain, the flood waters prevailed for 150 days. Then the water began to dry, and some months later, Noah’s family and the animals finally stepped out of the ark onto dry land.

And as Noah gazed upon the new earth cleansed of evil by the Flood, God made him a wonderful promise: “Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen. 9:11, ESV).² And in case you missed it the first two times, God adds one more time: “And the waters shall ***never again*** become a flood to destroy all flesh” (v. 15).

“Never again” are the words that we often speak after a terrible disaster or devastating massacre. “Never again,” we declared after the 9/11 attacks. “Never again,” we cried after Columbine in 1999. “Never again,” reads the monument in five languages at Dachau Concentration Camp, a monument to the horrors of the holocaust.³ (*Aside:* I took this picture when Lisa and I visited Dachau in 2017). Over and over again throughout human history we have vowed, “Never again,” only to see the wicked folly of human history repeat. The Nazis’ so-called “Final Solution” was not the last genocide. Remember Rwanda and Serbia? Since Columbine, there have been so many mass shootings at schools, movie theatres, and churches,

¹ Jesus clearly understands Noah to be a real, historic person and the Flood to be a historic event, not a myth or legend.

² All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

that we cannot even count anymore. And terror attacks continue around the globe. So much for “never again.”

Yet when God declares, “Never again!” he means it and does it. The Lord is faithful, and his Word is reliable and true. You can count on him because he never breaks a promise. And while we have seen devastating local floods, such as the Boxing Day tsunami in Indonesia (2004) and Hurricane Katrina (2005), never again has the Lord sent a Flood to kill every single living thing on earth—and he never will.

God swore to Noah, his family, all the animals—and every future generation:

“This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 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. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth” (Gen. 9:13-16).

More than merely a beautiful refraction of light, the rainbow is a binding seal of God’s promise: never again. And so, no matter how bad the weather gets—no matter how loud the thunder or how powerful the wind or how much it rains—God will not drown the entire world ever again.

No, the next time that God destroys the world will be at the Second Coming of Christ.

And this time, instead of water, he will use fire:

“For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly... But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.... [T]he heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!” (2 Pet. 3:5-7, 10, 12).

At the Day of the Lord (the Last Day), God will destroy the wicked, unbelieving world by fire. But those who belong to Christ will be saved. God loves the world so much that he sent his only-begotten Son to save us from our sin (John 3:16-17). At the cross, God poured out the fire of his wrath upon Jesus. And so Jesus saves us from the wrath to come.

Three times God declared, “Never again!” after the Great Flood of Noah. Never again will God destroy the entire earth by a Flood. He put his rainbow in the sky as a reminder of his unbreakable promise. Thousands of years later, Jesus Christ died “once for all” for the sins of the whole world (cf. Rom. 6:10; Heb. 10:10). That means Christ died *for you* to save you from the world’s coming doom. The disaster we deserve for our sins, God laid on Christ instead. “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will **NEVER DIE AGAIN**; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God” (Rom. 6:9-10).

The cross of Christ is God’s final declaration of “never again.” God sets the cross before us as a visual reminder—like the rainbow—that the way of life is open to all who come to Christ in faith. Christ has died once for all and will never die again. And now, because he lives, never again do we need to fear death, the grave, or even hell itself. Never again! In fact, those of us who believe and have been baptized into Christ have been saved through water and the Word just as Noah and his family were saved from the flood by the ark:

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:18-21).

Did you catch that? “Baptism... now saves you!” (1 Pet. 3:21). The cross of Jesus Christ is our ark—our salvation, our rescue. Just as the ark was the only escape from the Flood, so also the cross of Christ is our only escape. Jesus is our only hope. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.