

First Presbyterian Church
Genesis 7:11-24, 8:15-19, “The Reset Button”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 10/26/2025

[Sermon beginning:

Blow it .. stumble ... make a lot of mistakes]

Oh, my goodness. This isn't going very well, is it?

Can we just start over? Is that okay? Oh, thanks.

It's nice when you can just hit the reset button, right?

Fill in the blank:

The world would be so much better if I could hit the reset button on _____ .

My marriage!

My kids!

My retirement plan!

Capitalism!

Climate change!

That's what the Noah story is. It's the reset button.

Not just a little bit of a reset button.

The Flood is the big, big one that sits up on the high desk
we are not tall enough to reach.

Partly this is intuitive – it's clear that the flood wipes all the pieces off the board.

But the point is really driven home if we compare
the sequence of events with Genesis 1 account.

SLIDE

Creation Reset:

Watery chaos	Gen. 1:2 // Gen. 7:19
Acted upon by wind	Gen. 1:2 // Gen. 8:1
Dry land appears	Gen 1:9 // Gen. 8:13
God brings forth people and animals	Gen 1:24-27 // Gen. 8:15-17
Blessing “be fruitful and multiply”	Gen. 1:28 // Gen. 8:17
Plant a garden / a vineyard	Gen. 2:8 // Gen. 9:20 (“Noah, a man of the soil”)
Naked and unaware	Gen. 2:25 // Gen 9:21

Despite the major differences between Gen 1 and Gen 2,
this proves to me that the story tellers were aware of each other’s stories.

When I see that many parallels between the original creation stories
and the Noah flood story,
it leaves me with a strong impression that the narrator intends
to communicate something through this parallel.

The question being answered by the Noah flood is not
“What does God do when people are evil?”
The question being answered is,
“Will order be restored if God hits the reset button?”

SLIDE:

Adam & Eve: Would order be preserved if humans lived in paradise? no

Cain & Abel: Could order be restored if we eliminated our rivals? no

Lamech: Could order be restored if humanity
developed advanced technologies and cities? no

Table of Nations: Can national growth and human expansion
around the world bring order? no

Flood: Could order be restored to the earth if all the bad people were wiped out? no

I am persuaded that the first 11 chapters of Genesis
are archetypal thought experiments that explore all the ways
that order could be brought the world,
and all the ways those attempts fall short
of establishing the original order which God intended.

If you believe in a historical flood, I have no problem with that.
There *were* historical floods
and there is both geological and cultural evidence in that
from ancient cultures all around the world.

Along with that, we know that the Noah story is not unique to the Bible.
In fact, it matches quite closely
the features of other flood stories from Israel's neighbors
in the ancient near east.

For one example, the Babylonians had a story called the Atrahasis epic
which focuses on three gods –
Enlil, who decides to destroy humans through a devastating flood,
and Enki, the creator of humans who saves them from Enlil
by instructing a hero to build an ark and save all life,
and Mami, a co-creator of humanity who initially agrees
with the decision to destroy humans,
but then changes her mind and laments her earlier decision.

Does that sound familiar? It might, because by the time we're done
with the Genesis flood story, Yahweh has performed all three of those roles:
regretting the creation of humanity,
promising a flood, choosing a hero, killing everything off
and then promising to never do that again.

Every culture in the ANE was telling a flood story where everyone died.
The question was: what does your culture think the flood means?

For many readers of the Bible, the flood means that God saw humanity's evil,
regretted making humanity,
thought the world would be better off without us,
and sent a global flood to kill off all the people and animals.
The conclusion is that it is God's right to judge wickedness
and destroy everyone if that is what God decides to do.
So the story of the flood is about God's righteous judgment.

Well, to be honest, I have a hard time lining up the character of a Creator God
who would kill off every living thing on the planet
and the person of Jesus who died on a Roman cross
in order to redeem every living thing on the planet.

Those almost seem like opposites to me.

Now, to be sure, Yahweh has a complex set of characteristics in this story:
regretting making human beings, swearing to wipe them all out,
then choosing to save Noah,
and then finally promising not to do this again.

But for me, the claim that the Creator who came among us as Jesus Christ
also killed every living being on earth contains a contradiction.

So how do I resolve this tension without abandoning this section of Bible?

I don't think the flood is trying to tell us about how God *actually* deals with evil.

The flood imagines *what would happen* if God reset creation
as a way to eliminate all the evil on earth.

And as soon as it's done, Noah plants his vineyard of Eden.

He gets drunk on the grapes,
and his son sees his nakedness,
and his son tells his brothers about it,
and there's shame, and there's a curse,
and it soon enough becomes clear that
the creation reset didn't solve the problem.

Just like all the other scenarios explored in Gen. 1-11,
starting over with one holy family doesn't solve the problem
of chaos and disorder.

It's nice when we can hit reset on something in our lives.

Like when I'm playing the computer in chess and things aren't going well?
Reset! Undo those moves, let me try this game another way.

Do you ever wish you could just hit the reset button on your life?
What would you start over?

It's tempting to think,
"If we could just get a fresh start, everything would be better."

That's what we think.

And yeah, maybe if you hit reset on those things,
we could fix *some parts* of what has gone wrong
in our lives or in our world.
But guess what? Other things would go wrong.

If we were able to reset our family, reset our approach to saving money,
reset our worst decisions, reset our failed relationships,
we might be able to make some of those things go better.
But after a month, a year, a decade, we would look at our new lives
and realize *we had made a whole new set of bad decisions*.
Some things might be better, but others could end up much worse.

The flood story tells us that getting a fresh start, going back to ground zero,
won't solve our problems.

There's no timeline where any of us gets through life unscathed.

There's no timeline where the world gradually progresses into a utopia.

There's no magic solution that comes about by wiping all the
chess pieces off the board and playing that one piece differently.

If a reset doesn't fix everything, then what does that mean?

We must accept the world as it is.

There's no better world awaiting us on some other timeline.

There is evil and chaos and disorder in the world.

You can spend all day pointing fingers and blaming
people who are responsible.

Where does that get us?

The world is the way it is – with all of its beauty, promise and hope.

And all of its chaos, ugliness, and pain.

For those of us caught between these realities,

we are left with a choice:

The life of faith, trusting the way of our Creator,

or the life of self, trusting our own ability to set things right.

Think about the area of life or the world that you most want to see reset.

Can you give that over to God? Can you admit that even a global flood
wouldn't wipe out what you don't like about the world?

Instead of controlling the world, can you ask God to point you
in the way of faith...the way of love?

The way of faith is not the way of controlling others.

Faith does not take the reins and pilot the course of history.

Instead, faith trusts that God sees what happens
and invites God to bring about a new creation
within each of us and among all of us.

God is not done with us. God is not done with our world.

Because of the life of the Spirit who abides here among us today,
there is more for us to hope for than wiping it all away.