

A Fresh Start

<i>Text</i>	Genesis 8:18-9:29
<i>Readings</i>	1 Corinthians 10:1-13
<i>Theme</i>	God made a new beginning after the flood with a covenant with all living beings.
<i>Purpose</i>	To explain the covenant with Noah and all living beings and its applications to us.

Children, when you begin a new year of school you begin with a new set of books - clean exercise books for another year of schooling. And as you go through the year sometimes your teacher will say; "I want you to begin a fresh page in your exercise books."

There are times in our lives when all of us want to make a fresh start. We may have had something happen to us, or there may have been dramatic changes in our situation and circumstances, and we want to begin again. We have a few expressions for this. We talk about "turning over a new leaf", or "starting a new chapter in our lives".

This is what God did with Noah and with the world of his day. He washed it clean with the waters of his judgement and then he made a new beginning, a fresh start; he began a new chapter. Today we want to consider this new beginning and its applications to us in our lives.

1. God did this, first of all, by **RENEWING THE MANDATE** he had originally given to Adam and Eve right at the beginning.

In chapter 9:1 we read; "Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them; **be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.**"

Many people today would say that this no longer applies. Six billion people in the world are more than enough, they claim! The world is already over-populated, they say, and we should be lowering the birth rate, not increasing it.

Yet, as we noted in an earlier sermon, there is plenty of space on the earth for people to live; human beings only occupy a tiny fraction of the available land area of the world.

And we can, and do, produce enough food to feed everyone. The problem is not a lack of food but its unequal distribution. The problem is not too many people but rather too much human greed and sin and selfishness.

Those who watch population trends are already sounding a warning about the declining birth rates in Western Europe which are below replacement. If this continues then these countries will have decreasing populations in the decades to come.

So the command to fill the earth still applies to us today.

God not only wants us to populate the world but also to exercise **dominion over it**.

He did not repeat to Noah all he had said to Adam about ruling over the world, but he did highlight a change in their relation to the animals. Before the fall Adam ruled over the animals and they submitted willingly to him. After the fall the animals were afraid of man; “The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth... (vs 2).

God also noted another change: Verse 3: “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.”

Before the fall Adam and Eve ate only the plants. In this new situation God gave mankind permission to eat plants and animals.

This is our situation today. God have given us everything in the world for our enjoyment. A man may “eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his toil - this is the gift of God.” (Ecclesiastes 3:13).

Keep this in mind as you go about your work and activity in your homes and workplaces and in the church. Fulfil the mandate God has given you. Look after God’s world, draw out its resources, care for your pets and animals. Remember that God has given you a calling in this world he has made: it might be caring for your children, teaching at school, digging drains, or building houses, or making machines, or developing new products.

Maybe you need to make a fresh start in that, to get a new perspective, to turn over a new leaf as you fulfil the mandate God has given you.

2. Secondly, God gave Noah **A NEW PROMISE**

After Noah had emerged from the ark he took some of the clean animals and offered them to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

There is a lesson for us in that, because we often forget to thank God for helping us, or for answers to our prayers.

In response God promised a **regularity of seasons**. Look at verse 22... With these words God guaranteed a settled order in the world, a regular pattern in the physical processes that we can count on. We have noted some of these in earlier sermons. The earth’s rotation on its axis and its orbit around the sun are constant so there are 24 hours in a day and 365 days in a year. The force of gravity is constant, the sun is stable, the water cycle continues with evaporation and then condensation.

This means that this year, like last year, and next year, you can live, work, plan, study, research and travel knowing that all the natural processes of the world will continue on in the same way.

We call these “natural laws” but behind these a supernatural God is at work. All of these are the result of God’s powerful work as the Creator and he has promised regular patterns in the earth.

The other part of God's promise was formalised in a **covenant**. This word first appears in the Bible in Genesis 6:18 in words God spoke to Noah, and then here again.

A covenant is a solemn agreement or promise. God had already made a promise to Adam and Eve that he would send someone to crush the head of the serpent. In this covenant with Noah God promised that never again would he destroy all the earth with a flood (vs 11).

This covenant is *broad* in its scope because it is made with every living creature - with all of mankind and all the animals and birds (9:9-10).

It is a *permanent* arrangement because it is everlasting (verse 16).

And it is very *generous* because it is unconditional. God doesn't require anything of us or of the animals. It is an open promise of God with no strings attached. (Kidner's commentary on Genesis).

Covenants usually have a visible sign that go with them. In this covenant God gave the **rainbow** as a reminder of his promise.

Rainbows may have been seen before the flood but now God gave them a new meaning. A rainbow forms when the sun refracts the water vapour of the atmosphere into the seven colours of the spectrum. You get that same refraction when sunlight passes through a crystal or a prism. In certain conditions, usually following a rainfall, you can see a beautiful rainbow arching across the sky.

Whenever you see a rainbow think back to this promise of God that he will never again destroy the world with a flood. That is encouraging to remember. Sometimes you will see very dark clouds that threaten to bring a storm, or we can get caught in a very heavy downpour of rain or in a thunderstorm. Children, at times like that you might feel scared and afraid. But remember God's promise and look for the sign of the rainbow after the rain. God is watching over you and he will look after you and protect you.

3. God renewed his mandate and he made a new promise, and thirdly, he **RENEWED HIS LAW**.

God gave a command to Adam and Eve: they were not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In this new world after the flood God knew that the hearts of men and women were still sinful and that they would need more laws to restrain evil behaviour, and to explain how he wanted people to live, and so we read this law forbidding murder.

The reason for this command is that God made men and women in his image (9:6). Every person in the world bears the image of God in some way, however marred or scarred that may be. God wants each one of us to respect human life, no matter how young or old a person is; whether it is a baby in its mother's womb or an elderly person lying on a hospital bed. Each person is made in God's image.

God holds us accountable for taking the life of another. That is a sobering thought for those who have murdered someone, for those who have murdered babies in abortions, for those who have actively taken the life of an elderly person. Based on past statistics we can expect about 100 murders in New Zealand this year. As well as that there are about 17,000 abortions every year.

God said that he would demand an accounting for "lifeblood" (vs 5). Blood represent life. The New Zealand blood service encourages people to donate blood with their sticker: "Give life...give Blood." Without blood you will die. If you cut a major artery and don't stop the flow you will die very quickly.

So God says; "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed."

This lays down a basic principle of justice: life for life. If you murder someone you will be killed.

In the musical *The Mikado* by Gilbert and Sullivan one of the characters sings the line; "It is my aim in time, to make the punishment fit the crime, the punishment fit the crime." That was God's intent with this crime of murder.

The punishment did not encourage vengeance or revenge, nor did it allow a person to take the law into their own hands.

Rather it anticipated the institution of the government and the judicial system where a person could be tried and punished if found guilty. This rule did not mean that every murderer would be executed. Later on God gave more detailed laws that explained this law more precisely. A person was not executed for man-slaughter and could not be put to death unless there were two or three witnesses.

But God did lay out this basic principle: life for life.

In this new world God was making a fresh start and he renewed the creation mandate, "be fruitful and multiply"; he made a new promise and gave the sign of the rainbow; and he laid out a new law about murder.

4. Sadly, in this new world we also see evidence of **RENEWED SIN** described at the end of chapter 9.

Noah was a man of the soil, a farmer, and he planted a vineyard (vs 20). Nothing wrong with that. He made wine and drank some of it. Nothing wrong with that either. But then he drank too much; and that was wrong.

Drunkenness is an ancient sin. Many people today find it amusing. In some circles the enjoyment of a party is measured by how little of it you can remember the next day - which only illustrates the stupidity of such an attitude! God is not amused by drunkenness and he condemns it; also because it is closely connected with the sins of immorality, violence and murder. The police will be quick to tell you how much domestic violence and misery are associated with drunkenness.

In chapter 6 we read that Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time. Hebrews 11 lists him as one of the great men of faith. Yet he too was a sinner. He became drunk and lay naked in his tent. There are **a couple of lessons** in this.

One is that great men of God are still sinners. You might look up to some people and have a high regard for them. Remember that they are still human, otherwise you might become very disillusioned when they sin. Preachers and pastors are sinners, as are elders and deacons. None of us beyond falling.

And so the other lesson is that we must guard ourselves against temptation and sin. Don't rely on past righteousness, or previous experiences of God, or a good track record. What happened in the past will not guarantee the future. "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Pray each day; "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Noah's sin prompted further sin in **his son, Ham**, who saw his father's shameful state and went and told his two brothers. Ham's actions and his words were wrong. He should have covered his father, as his brothers did soon after. And he should not have told them about his father's condition. His words showed a lack of respect for his father. Maybe he ridiculed Noah; maybe he wanted to expose and emphasise this weakness in his dad. Whatever the motive what he did was wrong.

Later when Noah was sober and heard what had happened he cursed Ham's son, Canaan. It's not clear why he did that. Perhaps Canaan participated in this with his father. Perhaps he showed the same characteristics as Ham. Canaan, however, was not cursed for his father's sin but for his own.

Noah, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prophesied about the future of Canaan and his descendants; "**Cursed be Canaan!** The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers."

Later on the Canaanites included the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah and the Amorites and the Phoenicians. They were well known for their idolatry and the terrible practices of their religion which included child sacrifice and religious prostitution. Eventually they were judged by God either directly or through other nations.

But Noah **blest "the Lord, the God of Shem"** and included Japheth in the blessing that would come to his brother.

This goes back to that first promise of the gospel in Genesis 3:15 which gave a broad assurance that God would deliver his people.

Then in these words to Shem God focuses the fulfilment of this promise to his family - the Semitic people who lived in what we call the Near East.

Later God would focus that more narrowly in a promise to Abraham, and then sharper again in Isaac, and then again in Jacob, and then again in Judah.

Finally that promise would be fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, a son of David, from the tribe of Judah. God made a new beginning in Christ.

And just as Japheth would share in the promise to his brother Shem, so too all the peoples of the world would share in the promises given to Abraham and to David.

Those promises that were fulfilled when the risen and ascended Lord Jesus poured out his Holy Spirit at Pentecost and spread the good news to all the peoples of the world. "Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 3:6).

Today we have considered a new beginning, a fresh start.

Each one of us is part of this new beginning that God established in Noah.

You share in this mandate to fill and subdue the earth in the position and place God has put you.

You are part of God's promise to maintain an ordered and stable world and to sustain it until Christ returns.

You are to live by the laws God has laid out in his word.

And remember that you are a sinner, in need of God's grace, which he makes available to his people through Jesus Christ.

Do you need to turn over a new page in your life, to begin again, to make a fresh start?

Amen