

READ

Genesis 6:1 - 7:5

REFLECT

The flood is routinely taught as a lesson for children - because of the animals - but it's really one of the darkest occasions in all of scripture. From the onset there's a lot to have to deal with - every creature on earth, from humans to bugs, had resorted to evil and violence, so much so that God regretted creating the life that fills the world and vowed to destroy the life so carefully created. Maybe it's not too difficult to imagine a world beset by violence and evil, but it feels incongruent with our understanding of God to imagine God regretting anything. Added to the complexity is that God responded to the evil of the world by saving a family - if God regretted even creating humanity why would God want to save them? It may be that regret is too strong a word for what God was really feeling. The direct translation is "to be sorry or console oneself," so instead of regret, maybe God was just sad at the state of the creation God had so lovingly made. God literally blew life into the lungs of humanity, and humanity turned its back on God.

Just as God carefully created the world and everything in it, God gave Noah very detailed instructions to save enough life to give creation a second start. Noah had dimensions for a boat to build. He was instructed to pick several of every animal in existence (two different numbers are given, making it even more confusing - is it 7 or 2?) and some of every kind of plant life to be food for everything on board. This was a huge job, but Noah did it as instructed, solidifying himself as the right choice to lead creation's rebirth. Rebirth is often a pleasant image, but in this case it's filled with horror, because in order for the rebirth to occur everything on earth, save the animals Noah had collected, had to die. Not only were they to die, they would drown - not at all the way most of us would choose. Rebirth is a theme that continues throughout scripture, and in the Old Testament that rebirth is always very painful. That all changed with Jesus, though, whose death and resurrection made our rebirth painless.

REACT

- When you were taught the story of Noah as a child, how was it taught? Was it simply a story of blessing filled with rainbows and animals, or was the pain and sadness intrinsic to the story present? What do you think is lost if the more difficult parts of the story are left out, even when teaching children?
- Genesis 6 portrays God as sorrowful because of the state of humanity. How do you think God feels about humanity today? What might you do, in big or small ways, to change God's perception?
- Many people read of the wickedness of the earth during Noah's time and relate it to evil witnessed in our own age. Do you think the evil of this world, however you might define it, is worthy of divine punishment? What, in your mind, would be fair punishment? If the rest of the world deserves punishment, do you think you also deserve it?
- When have you needed to reinvent yourself? What did you need to let go of for that reinvention to occur? Is there room in your life for another reinvention, and what might that take?

RESPOND

Take a bath: *God responded to the wickedness of the world by drowning it, save those Noah and his family stowed away on their boat. Sometimes we get dragged down by the wickedness we see in the world too. Take a cue from God's anger and submerge yourself in water, but instead of a flood that brings about death and destruction, think of how a long, relaxing dip in the tub can rejuvenate you. Drown your worry, despair, anger, or whatever negative feelings you might be experiencing at any given moment and reflect on God's intention in creation and the love and justice present there. Consider how a more refreshed you might be better prepared to live into what God imagined from the beginning.*