

READ

Genesis 7:6 - 8:22

REFLECT

After all of Noah's preparation, the flood finally came. It rained for 40 days and nights as flood waters rose to cover every inch of the earth in water – even the tops of the highest mountains. You might be thrown off by the depth of the water as described in 7:20 – 23 feet/15 cubits, depending on your translation – which isn't anywhere near enough to cover even modest hills, let alone mountains. But this was understood to be 23 feet above the tallest mountain, or maybe even 23 feet from the upper atmosphere – the water was *deep*. The depth matters less than what is implied, though, which is that nothing, save for the lives in the ark, had any chance to survive. When we read that all life is wiped off the face of the earth, that everything took its final breath and then died, it's truly devastating.

Throughout it all there's no inkling about what Noah and his family may have thought during this ordeal. It must have been awful to have had to witness the drowning of all life. You also can't help but wonder how Noah and his family would have spent their days, aside from caring for all the animals they had on board. Were they mourning lost friends? Did they suffer trauma from seeing life erased before their eyes? No matter their thoughts or actions, we know they remained faithful. God eased the rain and the waters began to recede. Noah first sent out a raven and then a dove to check to see how much time might be left before dry ground was an option. After weeks of waiting, Noah, his family, and the animals were able to leave their life vessel. And Noah's first act, cementing why God had chosen him as the one through whom to restart creation, was to build an altar and praise God using entirely burnt offerings. That act of faith made God so happy that God promised to never again seek to destroy life on earth. This is the first of two promises that will be made to Noah and all humankind, though it's the lesser known because it doesn't include the rainbow. Still, a promise is a promise, and God keeps the promises God makes.

REACT

- Think of a time when others have suffered around you while you have not – how did you feel? Did you think you deserved to be saved from suffering? Did you feel guilty because you didn't think those suffering deserved their fate?
- Suffering is a constant presence in our world – how do you deal with hearing the constant barrage of bad news? Do you tune it out, seek to learn more, just get sad, or something else? What might be the most constructive path for you to process and respond to the suffering of others?
- How have you reacted to the various traumas of life? Do you think your own experience with trauma has made you more able to empathize with others, or has it done something else?

RESPOND

Light incense or a candle: *Upon exiting the ark, Noah made a sacrifice. We're told that God smelled the offering and the pleasing odor was what made God choose to covenant to never again destroy life on earth. Scent can be a powerful experience – it can make us feel relaxed and at home just as easily as it can make us gag and feel sick to our stomach. If you have incense or a candle that has a pleasing scent, create a comfortable space for you to light it, sit back, relax, and allow the fragrance to fill your nostrils. Allow the smell to take you to comforting memories that may be associated with the scent – maybe it's vanilla and it reminds you of making cookies with your grandma, maybe it's pine and it reminds you of Christmas as a child – whatever it is, allow yourself to go into that memory. Remember the goodness that exists, and the next time you're confronted with evil and suffering, find a way to take yourself back to that comforting place. In remembering, let yourself believe that even in suffering, peace and comfort are still possible. They've been promised to us by God in Christ, and it's a promise that cannot be taken away.*