

6th Sun. of Easter: Acts 17:22-31; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21; Psalm 66:7-18

Today in the book of Acts, we are told that we are God's offspring. Which means we are God's children. And in Genesis 1:27, we are told that God created us in his image, male and female. Which means God who created us in his image has both male and female attributes. God loves us like a Father, but with this being Mother's Day, it is good to remember that God loves us also like a mother. We are children of God and God loves us with motherly love. Attributes of a motherly love are that mothers are both forbearing and steadfast in their love. Jesus taught us to call God our Father, but also, Jesus likened his very self to a mother hen when he spoke of his wayward children saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings but you wouldn't let me." This maternal love of Jesus reveals God loves us despite our misbehaviors. God's love is forbearing and steadfast. Just as a mother still loves her two-year-old who dumps milk from the highchair onto the floor. She will discipline, but she still loves. And no matter what age that child grows to be, if the child were to become a wayward teenager, or an adult that winds up in jail, she would do anything to gather that child beneath her wings to make things right. Dad might give the child a kick in the butt for deserving it, but Mom, her heart will bleed until that child is made whole. If the child but turn to her and say, "I'm sorry," the heart of a mother forgives. And so it is with God, if we but turn and say we are sorry, God longs to gather us beneath loving wings to forgive us. This is God's most prevalent behavior toward us, throughout the whole of recorded history: to draw us beneath eternal all-caring wings for our well-being. For our healing and restoration if we but turn and say I'm sorry and go a different direction back toward God. Which is the definition of repentance. It is what Paul speaks of today saying: God "now commands all people everywhere to repent."

And like a mother, if her children become wayward, before her children even turn back toward her, even before we repent, God is forbearing. Peter today reminds us that God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark. Well, waited patiently for what? And I believe it was for people to repent and turn back toward God. I believe that God in his forbearing love gave people notice and time to repent. And there are thought provoking details in

Genesis to support this. Given we know that Noah's grandfather, Methuselah was the longest living person in scripture. We are told that Methuselah lived 969 years or almost a thousand years. There are theories as to why or how people lived longer, and some scientists have theorized that there were waters above the earth blocking the sun's harmful rays in that there may have been a vapor canopy. Genesis 1:7 tells us that God created the waters above and the waters below. And so it may be that when the flood occurred these waters from above or the vapor canopy are what flooded the earth which thereafter changed the climate shortening life spans. Scripture also indicates that it was not until after the flood that a rainbow was ever seen. And so, something in the atmosphere changed. But whatever the case, the bible says Methuselah lived 969 years or almost a thousand years which is the longest age recorded. And Methuselah was the son of righteous Enoch with Enoch being the great grandfather of Noah. We would have good reason to believe that Enoch was a prophet because, like Elijah, Enoch we are told, "walked with God," and did not die but was taken up into heaven. And if Enoch be a prophet, God would have revealed to Enoch what God was going to do in bringing the flood. We are told in Amos 3:7: "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets." A flood would be something the Lord would not do without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. This pattern is consistent of God throughout all of scripture. And to further support that God revealed what he was going to do, he had Enoch name his son, Methuselah. According to A.R. Fausett in his Bible Dictionary, a meaning for the name Methuselah can be: "he dies and it is sent." God had Enoch name his son, "he dies and it is sent." Which would have been noteworthy. People would want to know what was going to be sent when Methuselah dies. God often in scripture instructed people to name their children names in order to convey a message. The Virgin Mary herself was told to name Jesus, "Jesus," because it means "the Lord is Salvation." And the Lord is our Salvation. Jesus was named by God the Father for exactly what Jesus came to do. Save. And so, I believe, it would not be unrealistic to think that Enoch may have been shown the flood would come but not until Methuselah died which may be why Methuselah was named, "he dies and it is sent." Mathematically if you take the life spans accounted for in scripture, Methuselah dies and then the flood occurs. Scripture tells us Methuselah fathered Lamech when he was 187 and Lamech fathered Noah

when he was 182 and the flood occurred when Noah was six hundred years old. $187+182+600 = 969$, which is the age Methuselah was when he died. Which means God being forbearing would have given people as much time as possible, permitting Methuselah to be the longest living human being. People hearing the witness of Enoch in Methuselah's name would have been given enough time to know about the impending flood and would have had plenty of time to turn toward God and repent. And some may say to me, "But Heather, surely the fact that Enoch may have been a prophet and the meaning of Methuselah's name with him being the longest living human and the timing of his death as set forth in genealogies is merely a coincidence." But I say to you, if you call every seeming coincidence in scripture a coincidence you will coincidence yourself to death because scripture is miraculous. It is the word of God. Furthermore, we know that Peter tells us in 2nd Peter 2:5, that Noah was a preacher of righteousness while he was building the ark. Like people would have asked Noah, "Hey, Noah, why are you building the ark." The building of the ark would have been quite noticeable. And Noah would have told them why he was building the ark letting them know about the importance of living in right relationship with God. In fact, the writer of Hebrews tells us, "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping the faith." And so, Noah was warned by somebody, perhaps directly from God or perhaps Enoch and in the naming of Methuselah, and the rest of the world could only have been condemned if they had been made aware. People were aware of the really big boat and the reason it was being built. And God was very forbearing because even if you don't agree with the Enoch and Methuselah possibility, Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came. At the very least, scripture tells us he gave birth to his sons after being five hundred, and so even if Noah didn't start building the ark until his sons were in their twenty's the world had one hundred years of warning. And so, at the very least, people were warned one hundred years and possibly a thousand. God did all this to give his wayward children time to turn back to him. And the people God waited for during the building of the ark hadn't merely dumped milk on the floor, mind you. In fact, in Genesis chapter 6 we are given reason for the flood, and I quote: "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every

inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” Wow. We need to think about that. Given there is a lot that is going wrong in our world today, and we grieve over the wickedness and evil that we see. The shootings and the wars and the global tensions, yet even now we are not to a point where every inclination of the thoughts of every human heart on the entire earth is only evil all the time. I mean think about that. What would the world be like if this were so? Well, not a world that anyone would want to live in. It would be insufferable. It would justify a flood.

And yet God in his mercy still loved the wayward people of Noah’s time. We are told of this today. And we also know that of these people, who in former times did not obey God, who had time to turn toward God because they watched the ark being built, of these people who had only evil inclinations and evil thoughts all the time, for these people, Jesus died. We are told of this type of love in scripture where it says: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” (Romans 5:8). And also, that not only did Christ die for us while we were yet sinners, but he died not only for us but for the sins of the whole world, (1 John 2:2). The people who died in the flood are part of the whole world. And so, not only did Christ die for them, but after Christ died, after he was laid in the tomb and before he even resurrected, the very first thing Jesus did while he was still spirit and not yet resurrected, was go to the people who had died in the flood, who were waiting as spirits beyond the grave. The psalmist today says God, “holds our souls in life.” And so, these souls were being held in life beyond the grave. And Jesus we are told today, and I quote: Jesus, “was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, (the better word being Sheol), who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark.” I have heard commentaries try to say that this refers only to Jesus preaching through Noah leading up to the flood, but that in no way is supported by the scripture which clearly states after Christ was put to death in the flesh and made alive in the spirit he went to make a proclamation to the spirits who in former times....And so, clearly, Peter is talking about Jesus going somewhere in the spirit after he died to people who lived in a former time. And so, Jesus goes to these people who died in the flood and now are alive in the spirit beyond the grave in order to make a proclamation to them. And I believe the

proclamation was that Jesus had undergone a baptism on their behalf in order to pay for their sins. Jesus tells us, "I have a baptism to undergo and how distressed I am until it is accomplished," (Luke 12:50). The baptism whereby he paid for the sins of the whole world. The death and resurrection that water baptism symbolizes and that we are told the flood prefigured. If we are in Jesus, we are saved, if we reject Jesus and do not get on the boat, we drowned. The Apostle John tells us this saying: "Whoever has the son has life and whoever does not have the son does not have life," (1 John 5:12). We are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection just as Peter explains today saying that during the time of Noah, eight persons were saved through water, and baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you, as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The only way we have a good conscience towards God is through Jesus who wipes clean our sins, washing us through and through in his death and resurrection. And I believe this could have been what Jesus proclaimed to the spirits of the people who had died in the flood given the context of the surrounding scriptures. I do not believe that Jesus went to these spirits for any reason other than to give them hope, for why else would he go to them? I don't think he went to them to say, "Nanner, nanner, I told you so." Because going to these souls was important to Jesus. Clearly it was urgent and important to Jesus that he go to them. Like if I had just been crucified, I might have taken the day off and just rested inside the tomb until the resurrection, *but no*. Before he even resurrected, Christ went in the spiritual realm to the people who died in the flood because he loves them with the steadfast love of a parent. I do not believe he went to judge the souls who were waiting in order to condemn them because the day of judgment has not yet come. Paul tells us today that God has fixed a day when the world will be judged. And so, I believe, Jesus went to proclaim what had been done for them through his death on the cross. And what this mean for those souls in terms of eternity, I do not know, but I do know that a maternal type of love would traverse the very grave to redeem her wayward children.

The point of all this being, that this is how God loves us. God has always been forbearing in wanting us to come to Him, and God is able to forgive anything if we but turn toward him and ask. Just as a mother would forgive her child yet even more so because we, being human, at times do not forgive. Yet God has

removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west and remembers them no more. God has the ability to actually remove our sins from us. For like a mother who would die to save her child, so Jesus died for us. And with an enduring and steadfast love, Christ loves us. Today Christ promises he has sent us his indwelling Spirit to be with us forever. And is this not only a motherly love but also a perfect love? To never stop loving and to provide a means for our everlasting felicity? Who upon glimpsing this type of love would not want to hunker under the wings of the Almighty?

And I tell you these things today because just as Christ has maternal love for us, we are told today to be ready to give an account of the hope that lies within us. We, like children responding to the love of a parent should love our Lord Jesus in return. Scripture says, "We love him because he first loved us," (1 John 4:19). And so, we should be like we were when we were children and someone would tease us with "Your Mama," jokes. Or taunt us saying, "Your mother wears army boots." Which actually sounds like a compliment to me, but when we were little, it was never intended as such, and it would fire up the hackles on your neck and you would defend your Mama. An so I ask you, do you love God enough to make a defense? And have you equipped yourself to do so? When someone says to you how could a loving God send a flood are you ready to make a defense that God is forbearing and steadfast in loving us based on what Holy Scripture says to us? Well, I hope so. I hope you know the intensely fierce irrevocable undying motherly love that Christ Jesus has for us given we are assured in Romans chapter 8 verses 38 and 39 "that neither death nor life, neither angels, nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord," (Romans 8:38-39). Happy Mother's Day! *Amen.*