

**"TRIUMPH OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT: CREATING A NEW
TOMORROW"**

June 25, 2017

Gen 6:9-22 (*The Message Bible*)

This is the story of Noah: Noah was a good man, a man of integrity in his community. Noah walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

As far as God was concerned, the Earth had become a sewer; there was violence everywhere. God took one look and saw how bad it was, everyone corrupt and corrupting—life itself corrupt to the core.

God said to Noah, "It's all over. It's the end of the human race. The violence is everywhere; I'm making a clean sweep.

"Build yourself a ship from teakwood. Make rooms in it. Coat it with pitch inside and out. Make it 450 feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. Build a roof for it and put in a window eighteen inches from the top; put in a door on the side of the ship; and make three decks, lower, middle, and upper.

"I'm going to bring a flood on the Earth that will destroy everything alive under Heaven. Total destruction.

"But I'm going to establish a covenant with you: You'll board the ship, and your sons, your wife and your sons' wives will come on board with you. You are also to take two of each living creature, a male and a female, on board the ship, to preserve their lives with you: two of every species of bird, mammal, and reptile—two of everything so as to preserve their lives along with yours. Also get all the food you'll need and store it up for you and them."

Noah did everything God commanded him to do.

Well, now, but that life could be so perfect, so well-designed, and by the Creator, no less. Granted that Noah was undoubtedly taken aback when God broke into his life in such a personal way. He was probably just sitting around on his deck having an ice-cold Coors after a hard day's work doing only God-knows-what, and here in a pillar of smoke comes God.

"Noah! Noah!"

"Who be dat? Who calling me?"

"Noah, it's God. The Almighty. Maker of Heaven and Earth. Your Creator. You know, the one who brings the rains and the wind, the sun and the moon."

"God? God? That God? What you want with me, God?"

"Well, I'm fixing to destroy the world, Noah, if the truth be told. People are evil; my experiment has failed. So, I'm going to throw you all in, the whole Creation."

"I don't understand. Why you telling me this, Lord?"

"Noah, you are a good man. You may drink a little too much Coors, but basically, you're okay—you and your family. And animals, animals are good. I want to save the animals. That's it! I'll save you, your family, and two of each of the animals."

God proceeds to tell him how to build his ancient rocket ship, an ark that will float above the huge flood that God intends to let loose onto the world. Can you just imagine it? As John Denver used to say, "Farrrr out!"

Fast forward to 1961. The world has rebuilt itself over all these millennia. The United States of America and the United Soviet Socialist Republic are in a cold war with each other. Both the US and Russia are racing each other to get a man to the moon and a usable missile defense program in their arsenals.

America is embroiled in racial tension at the same time. The races are divided, and Black Americans are reminded daily that separate is not equal. Yet the government finds that there is a pool of mathematically brilliant black women that are willing to work on NASA projects. They are called, "Colored Computers," and their workplace is a separate room on the NASA campus at Langley Air Force Base.

One of their number, Mary Jackson, is called to the main think tank center at Langley. Her task is to check the calculus of the white

engineers there who are working to put John Glenn into space orbit. Mary is a genius, and it soon becomes apparent to the project supervisor, Al Harrison, that she is also a creative thinker. He orders her to check everyone else's work, a move that angers the white, male engineers and causes them to ostracize her even further.

I'm sure she was asking God a whole lot of questions, too, just like Noah did when he received his impossible call. Unbeknownst to her at the time, she was creating the future for all the women, women of color, and men of color, too, who worked with her or her followed after her into science and mathematics in this country.

Her friends get their breaks, too. "Hidden Figures" tells their true story, and it is our featured film tonight at our Summer Film Festival. We learn how Dorothy Vaughan wins the respect of her white supervisor by learning how to exponentially speed up needed calculations using the "IBM," the first computer to be used by NASA. Ms. Vaughan finds a way for all the "colored computers," the cadre of female black mathematicians to keep their jobs by learning to use the computer. She

makes her own history, but I won't spoil it for you how she does so. Come see the movie and be inspired in her story.

The third woman whose story is told in the film is Katherine Johnson, one of the female computers who has a dream for more. She wants to be a space engineer, but NASA does not allow either women or blacks to apply for their program.

God's hand works in mysterious ways. Whether it is by giving the specs for construction of a massive ship to an ancient man in a time-honored faith story or by planting specs for how to launch and land a spaceship in the mind of an equally unlikely modern-day miracle worker, the fascination and excitement of possibility and opportunity is the same.

Again, my bathroom calendar quotes came through this week. I had just finished watching the film again on Monday night when on Tuesday morning, an anonymous quote greeted me as I reached for my

toothbrush. It said, "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

As we move in just a few minutes into our Mid-Year Congregational meeting, let's remember this wisdom. Our church is growing both in membership and in action, but we all must do our part to make this ship sail soundly and to fly right. Our calculations do not need to be as precise as those given to Noah or those discovered by Mary, but we cannot afford either to just sit around and talk about our future as a church. We must *create* our future.

It takes volunteer time, it takes expertise, and it takes a willingness to serve the teams of the church and to perhaps form new ones—we sure haven't thought of everything or done everything that God is calling us to do. Are you serving the church in some capacity? If not, I encourage you to take some prayerful time to consider how you might plug in in some tangible ways so that all bodies here contribute to the health and welfare and mission of the whole.

It also takes money. We have a new well to dig, a big tree to take down, kids to provide for downstairs in Sunday School, out in summer camp and on mission experiences, and a worship and community center to maintain, update, and expand. We have grounds that need maintenance, too. How important is it to you to be a part of preserving our beautiful campus for our children and grandchildren, for our adults and our seniors, too?

No one can predict the future and no one can predict when God will break into our lives and call us to the impossible. So, in the meantime, let's be pro-active! Let's *create* our bright and beautiful future. No one handed Noah a team of carpenters; no one handed Dorothy and Katherine and Mary the keys to the kingdom.

Noah is fabled to have built the ark to God's specifications and by his faithfulness to have saved the planet from extinction. The three ladies of the story, "Hidden Figures," used their brains to create their new futures, true, but they couldn't have done so without a whole lot of

heart and a deep, abiding faith that God wanted them to live stories of groundbreaking and barrier-busting greatness.

Where is your heart today, UCC Parker Hilltop? What is the future you will create through collaborative, collective imagination and actualization? The future is waiting for us, eagerly, impatiently, and with great excitement. It is an ark; it is a rocket ship.

Let's build our ark against the rising tide of the outside world's skepticism and negativism. Let's calculate our way to the stars and launch this rocket ship we call "church" into the great Unknown, into the great Possibility, so that those who wander to these crossroads and into our building will here find God, will here find God's call on their lives, and will here find love and commitment, acceptance and connection, the bright and beautiful church life they have only dreamed of in the past.

We ARE the church. We ARE UCC Parker Hilltop. And we ARE beloved children of God, called, empowered, and alive with the Word and the Spirit.

May it Be So.

