

[Genesis 6: 9-22; 7:24; 8:14-19](#)

[Psalm 46](#)

[Romans 1: 16-17; 3:22b-28, \(29-31\)](#)

[Matthew 7: 21-29](#)

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND ALISTAIR SO ON THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, JUNE 1, 2008, AT ALL HALLOWS CHURCH, SOUTH RIVER PARISH, IN DAVIDSONVILLE, MARYLAND

In the Name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, ever Creating, Redeeming, and Sustaining. Amen.

Water is a peculiar creation of God. We love it and we hate it. My friend from Ireland taught me the phrase “**Uisce beatha**” (pronounced “[ishka ba-ha](#)”), meaning “water of life,” or another name for the spirit of “whisky.” Well, that kind of water certainly requires much moderation. Each summer, many people travel great distances to see water in sunshine and frolic in it. Yet, we know that water in the forms of floods, cyclones, and tsunamis has claimed many lives. But we still love water because we need it to stay alive: the human body is 65% water. Water is also ubiquitous in our symbols of faith: the water of baptism, the water mixed in the wine at the Eucharist, the holy water in the font, etc. God uses the created matter of this world to show us that he cares about us. God can use water or anything in the natural world to show us his love and mercy. And our proper response is our complete trust and faith.

The Story of Noah is a story of God’s mercy meeting one man’s faith in the context of a natural disaster. Research in biblical history reveals that there was a great flood in the ancient Near East around the time of Noah. We find parallel stories in the nearby cultures, such as the Gilgamesh Epic in Mesopotamia. The gist of the Noah story is that there is violence in creation caused by humanity and God decides to start afresh. Noah is the only blameless and righteous man who walks with God. For his sake, God wants to save him and his family, and two of each of the animals on the face of the earth. Then, the great flood comes and destroys the old world order. Once the water has subsided, God makes a covenant with Noah. And God reaffirms that humankind is created in his likeness. To seal that covenant, God creates the rainbow for the new world order: “My bow I have put in the cloud.” In Hebrew, “bow” and “rainbow” are the same word. Therefore, the rainbow can also symbolize God’s hanging up his bow and arrows in the sky---essentially a peace treaty with humanity. The rainbow describes a new relationship between God and humanity. Biblical scholar Delitzsch eloquently puts it:

*It [The rainbow] is indeed a phenomenon that may be accounted for by natural laws; but the laws of nature are truly the appointment of God (Ecclus 43:11ff) and it is just in its conformity to natural law that the rainbow is a pledge that the order of nature shall continue. And is there not to every law of nature a background pointing to the mysteries of the Divine nature and will? The label of the rainbow is sufficiently legible. Shining upon a dark ground, .... it represents the victory of the light of love over the fiery darkness of wrath. Originating from the effect of the sun upon a dark cloud, it typifies the willingness of the heavenly to penetrate the earthly. Stretched between heaven and earth, it is as a bond of peace between both, and, spanning the horizon, it points to the all-embracing universality of the Divine Mercy (1:289-90). [1]*

Sisters and brothers in Christ, now, I think that we have gotten somewhere. Now, we have arrived at the realization of the fact that God’s mercy triumphs over all. The ultimate limit imposed on evil is the Divine Mercy. The myth of Noah’s story is that all truly deserved to perish because of sin. But God is

merciful and all-loving and he did not exact the entire, due punishment for the sins of humanity. Historical reality likely points to the fact that Noah's family was not the only family left at the time. There was a great flood and great destruction. But many were spared because of the Divine Mercy. To be embraced by this Divine Mercy, we need to walk with God as Noah did. We need to have the faith of Noah.

Paul the Apostle further exhorts us that "the one who is righteous will live by faith." Living by faith means trusting that God wills the best for us and God wills to do us good in all things. My friends, faith allows us to have a personal relationship with God, who is our very present help in every danger. I know of the old, old story of Martin Luther's conversion---that ultimate Lutheran friend of ours. Luther spent much of his early life in the earthly pursuit of happiness, fun and excess. One day, on his way back to Erfurt where he was training to be a Doctor of Philosophy, he had a dramatic interior and exterior conversion experience.

Luther is now near the city gate. Suddenly, black clouds gather overhead, and it begins to thunder. The lightning was blinding and awful. Martin Luther is very scared. Then, a bolt falls at his feet, throwing him down. In his mind, the Great Judge has descended in this cloud. He lies there quietly, momentarily expecting death. In his terror he prays to St. Anne, his family patron saint that he vows to become a monk if God spares him from death.<sup>[2]</sup> (Protestant commentators later only describes Luther turning to God without the invocation of saints.) The rest is history: Luther becomes a monk and priest in the Augustinian order and later aims to reform the Catholic Church.

In Luther's conversion, we see his relationship with God in the context of his ultimate entrustment at the near point of death; we see his relationship with God in the context of natural laws. God's mercy triumphs over his fear, his smallness, and even the laws of nature. From this formative experience, Luther paraphrases Psalm 46 in our lectionary today and renders up the all time favorite "*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing...A helper he amid the flood, of mortal ills prevailing.*"

God wills to do us good in all things and at all times, in sickness and in health, in sunshine and in rainfall, in good times and in bad times. God showers us with blessings always. All we need to do is to offer our faith and our trust. I take particular consolation in Sister Faustina's vision in which Jesus says, "*When a soul approaches Me with trust, I [will] fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself, but radiates them to other souls*" (Diary, 1074). Open your hearts wide to Jesus, and God will count our faith as righteousness. Our faith will put in a state of grace when we can truly live out our prayer to forgive those who trespass against us and receive God's forgiveness. With an open and forgiving heart, we can experience the wideness of God's mercy, which is much broader than the measure of our minds.

Now, for God's mercy in saving Noah; for God's mercy in sending Jesus Christ for our salvation; and for God's mercy in endowing the Church with the Holy Spirit, let every shower of rain and fall of dew, all winds and fire and heat; winter and summer, glorify the Lord, praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

Amen.

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[1] Wenham, Gordon J., Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15, p. 196, Word, Incorporated 1987  
[2] ([James A. Wylie, "The History of Protestantism", Volume 1, Book 5, Chapter 2](#)).