

Sermon Draft for March 19, 2025, Lenten Midweek 3
The Good News of a Savior Who Gives Us a New Beginning
Text: Genesis 6:1-8

Have you ever felt as if things had hit rock bottom and you needed a fresh start? If you haven't, then be thankful because it can happen to anyone. It could be because of the circumstances around you. It could be because of what's been going on within you. But when you find yourself in such a situation where the only solution seems to be somehow starting over it can be easy to wonder whether a fresh start is really possible.

In our third midweek text from Genesis, in the days of Noah, such a time had come, not just for him but also for mankind. Things had hit rock bottom.

Believers, "the sons of God" had not made the faith a priority in their marriages and families but had simply married whichever "daughters of men" appealed to them. Beauty on the surface was prized more than the inner beauty of a godly woman's heart.

And as faith was put to the side in families and homes, it went to the wayside for nearly all humanity. We know that a living faith shows itself in works and the lack of faith at that time showed itself in callousness, hedonism, and violence.

Just how bad had things gotten? We learn in Genesis that it came to the point where it grieved God that he had created man. If ever a new beginning was needed, it was then. But if you were to look around at the world at that time, it would have been natural to wonder whether a new beginning was even possible or if things had already gone too far. In our reading from Genesis, the situation is looking very dire when we hear God say that he will blot out man from the land.

Then, though, we hear one three-letter word that changes everything: “but.” God said he would blot out man from the land.

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (v 8). Like the rest of mankind, Noah was a sinner. But Noah had faith in the Lord and the Lord counted his faith as righteousness.

By grace alone through faith alone, Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Because of God's grace, everything changed for Noah and for mankind. A fresh start for man might have seemed impossible. But with our gracious God, all things are possible. God told Noah that because of man's violence, man would be destroyed by a flood. But God promised Noah that he and his family, his wife, his three sons, and his sons' wives would be delivered through the flood in an ark that Noah was to build.

God gave Noah instructions for building the ark and told him to fill it with two of each sort of animal and with every kind of food. In faith, Noah followed God's Word.

As Noah waited, he also spoke God's Word to the people around him. He was ***“a herald of righteousness”*** (2 Peter 2:5). But they didn't listen.

After 120 years of preaching, building, and waiting, the time came. At God's command, Noah went into the ark with his family and the animals. The Lord shut him in and soon the storm began. It rained forty days and forty nights. Water covered the earth, and every creature on land was blotted out in God's judgment. Only Noah and those with him in the ark remained.

After 150 days, the ark came to rest in the mountains of Ararat. And after another 220 days, the ground had dried to the point where Noah, his family, and the animals were able to leave the ark and embark upon a new beginning for mankind. It seems new beginnings are possible after all.

On a worldwide basis, things never again sank as low as they had in the days before the flood. Yet the underlying problem of sin remained. It was seen in Noah himself and in his family. Before long, it would be seen in man's refusal to spread across the earth as the Lord had said to do.

People chose instead to band together and try to demonstrate their own greatness by building a tower to the heavens at Babel.

God had granted deliverance from the violence of the preflood era and had given mankind a fresh start. But people still found themselves confronted by sin from without and from within. Another deliverance was needed.

In the fullness of time, that needed deliverance was provided as the same God who had saved Noah and his family from a sin dominated world now took action to save mankind from sin itself. And the way he would accomplish this new deliverance would bear a striking resemblance to the earlier deliverance.

Just as the problem of evil had needed to be confronted at the time of the flood, so the evil of our sin could not simply be overlooked but needed to be confronted and dealt with once and for all. And just as God had earlier provided the way of rescue through the ark, so he would also provide the way of rescue for us.

To deliver us from sin and give us a fresh start in God's grace, our Lord Jesus Christ gave himself into death, as on the cross he experienced in our place the flood of God's righteous judgment for our sins. He bore our sins and the sins of all people of all time and he let the just judgment for those sins pour over him. For each of our thoughtless words, the waves crashed down on him. For all our unholy thoughts, the torrents of judgment beat against him. For all our loveless deeds, the waters rose higher and higher until that flood of judgment took his life.

And as he took our place in that flood, he also provided an ark of salvation for us. By the power of the Gospel, through his means of grace, he brings us into the "ark" of the Holy Christian Church, where by God's grace we are sheltered in Christ Jesus and his righteousness. In this ark, we are saved from judgment and given a new beginning with our sins taken away, and with new peace, new light, and hope that does not disappoint.

In Christ Jesus, God has saved us from sin and given us new and everlasting life.

As we heard earlier from Peter's first epistle, in the ark, eight persons were brought safely through water, and ***“baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”*** (1 Peter 3:21). When God gave mankind a new beginning by saving Noah and his family in an ark through the waters of the flood, he was pointing ahead to the greater new beginning he would give us as he saves us in Christ Jesus through the waters of Holy Baptism.

Through the washing away of your sins, God has given you a cleansed conscience. In the power of Christ's resurrection, he has raised you up to new life. Through the power of his Word, he keeps you in this new life—so that your life in him is always new.

And that new life will never end. On the day when Christ comes again in glory to judge the living and dead, he will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Christ. Those who have rejected him and the life he offers will be taken away in judgment, like the people at the time of flood. And, as in the days of Noah, those who have trusted in the Lord will remain to begin another new day together with the Lord—joining him and all believers in Christ to live together in God’s renewed creation. There all things will be new and there will never again be a need for a new beginning.

After the flood, God placed a rainbow in the sky and said the rainbow would serve as a reminder of his promise that a worldwide flood would never be repeated.

Now we look to the cross of Christ; look to his empty tomb; look to your baptism into Christ; look to the words of eternal life God has given in Holy Scripture and see in them God’s promise to all of mankind.

Our sins have been dealt with once and for all and that new and everlasting life is yours, never to be taken away.

All glory, honor, and praise be to Christ Jesus our Savior, who makes all things new. Amen.