

Day Four

Scripture:

Genesis 6-9 (Alternative: Genesis 6:9-13; 7:1-5; 8:13-17)

Reflection:

Every so often you will see a roadside sign or billboard or a church sign that says, "The end is near." It is easy to smile at such a message. We rightly assume people have been saying like that for hundreds of years. And, since we are still here, it is easy to assume we will be here tomorrow and the day after and the day after...

But, of course, that's utter nonsense. For many people who drive past those signs, half smiling at the religious naivety they represent, the end is near. Often times, much nearer than they thought. Someone fails to carefully stop at a stop sign. Someone drives too fast on a rain-soaked road. A routine test comes back, and the doctor tells you it reveals something that is not at all routine.

For more people than we want to admit, belief in God will not come as a comforting religious conviction, but as a terrifying realization just beyond the last beat of their heart. For all of us, the future can sometimes seem ominous and foreboding.

The story of Noah is both comforting and frightening. It is about God saving Noah and his family. It is also about God caring about the animals of the earth. But, the story has a darker side. It is the account of a time when God brought terrible punishment to the whole world. For them, it was not

just an amusing story about saving puppies and hamsters. The account of the Great Flood was the undeniable proof that the God who is love is also the God who is just.

After the flood, God promises Noah he will never again the destroy the world with water. But, He does not say he will never again destroy the world. Jesus will warn those who hear Him that, "just as it was in the days of Noah," that's how it will be at the end of the world.

But, Jesus also tells us that God loved the world so much He gave His one-and-only Son to the world. Jesus says that God did not do this to condemn the world, but to save it. Peter means that every time we see someone baptized, we should think of how God used the flood to make a new world for Noah – a world washed clean of evil (1 Peter 3:20-21). The promise of Christmas is the promise that, because of Jesus, the end can be just the beginning.

Family:

Bring some small boxes.

Begin by telling everyone to make-believe a big storm is coming. We only have room for each person to quickly put some of their favorite things in one box each. Everything inside the boxes will be saved from the storm. Tell them they have just two minutes to go and put everything in their boxes they want to keep. If it is not in the box, it's going to be washed away by the flood. Now, start a timer and send them to their rooms with their boxes. Count out loud the last 20 seconds. Ask everyone to put their boxes back on the table.

This Jesse Tree ornament (a rainbow) reminds everyone about God's promises to Noah. The rainbow in the sky is a

reminder of the terrible flood. But, it is also to make us think about God's promises. God loves and protects Noah. God tells Noah to build an "ark."

But the word ark does not mean a boat. The word ark means a box or chest or basket for holding things. These boxes on the table could be called arks. What Noah will build is a giant box made out of wood. It is a box big enough to hold all those animals along with Noah and his family.

What did everyone pick out to save in our boxes? (Let each person explain why they picked some things. If they did not pick something you know they actually would want to keep, ask them about it. Tell them it is sad that they forgot something important.)

Now, the very first thing God would put into that box if He wanted to save what He really loved would be you. God would want us to be safe from the flood. That is why Jesus came. Jesus came to make sure God had big enough boat for every single person who wants to be safe. But this boat Jesus comes to give us is not a giant box. It is the church. Not the building we go to on Sunday. The church is really the people, not the building. Remind them to be thankful that God loves us. God loved us so much He sent Jesus to make sure we are safe.

Prayer:

Talk to God about things that might happen in the future that make you scared or worried or anxious. Is one of those things the idea that, just maybe, the end is near (or, at least, might be near)?

Thank God for His justice. Would God be worthy of worship if He was not angry at evil? One of the things God is praised for in scripture is His wrath – His divine and entirely justified anger at evil people. Thank God for sending the flood and for saving Noah from all that evil. Reflect what Peter says, it was not the Ark that saved Noah from the water, it was the water that saved Noah from the corruption of the world.

Finally, thank God that He promised not to destroy the world in the same way. Thank God that, through Jesus, he has promised those who believe in Jesus will never have to face condemnation. For them, every grave is just a borrowed grave.