With all living beings
Genesis 9:8-17
October 10, 2004

Long, long ago, when the earth was much younger than it is now and when the first pages of history had not yet been written, there came a great flood upon the earth. There came a great flood upon this earth, upon the earth we now call our home! The great flood came upon the earth, and every bird and every animal and every human being that lived on the face of the earth died. Well, almost every one! This is the story of that great flood …

In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in darkness. But God spoke and the world came into being! The water released the earth and dry land sprang up! The land was filled with plants of every kind and animals of every kind. The oceans and lakes were filled with fishes and sea creatures of every kind and the skies with birds of every kind. And all of it was good! All of it was very good! God looked at everything he had made and God was very pleased!

God was very pleased with us. God made us, human beings, to be like himself. We were made like the animals, too. We are creatures of the earth -- we eat, we sleep, we reproduce. But God made us special. God made us to be like himself … creatures, yes, but creatures with a special task, creatures with a special responsibility. God made us to love the earth, to watch over it, to care for it and protect it. God made us to love him, to care for him and live in communion with him. God looked at us, the creatures God had made to be like himself, and God was very pleased.

But we were not pleased. We were restless and unhappy. We wanted to know more. We wanted to have more. We wanted to be more. We wanted everything our way, not God’s way -- and so we got everything our way, not God’s way -- and we filled with earth with greed and envy and lust. We filled the earth with hatred and revenge. We filled the earth with evil and with violence.

And God was sorry. God was sorry that he made us. God was sorry that he made anything. The world God made good was filled with evil. The world God made beautiful was filled with ugliness. The world God made peaceful was filled with violence. So God decided to wash away all the evil, all the ugliness, all the violence. God decided to send a great flood.

But God remembered Noah. God remembered Noah and God was pleased with Noah. Noah was a good man. Noah did what was right. So God told Noah to build a boat.

Build a boat, Noah. Build a big boat -- a boat 450 feet long and 75 feet wide and 45 feet high!

Get in the boat, Noah. Get in the boat and take your wife with you. Take your sons and your sons’ wives with you.

Get in the boat, Noah, and take some of every kind of bird and every kind of animal with you.

God remembered Noah. And God remembered the animals, too. God did not forget them. God did not forget that he made them good.
Noah did what God told him to do. Noah built the boat. Noah got into the boat with his wife and his sons and his sons’ wives and all the animals. And then it started to rain. It started to rain and it didn’t stop raining for forty days and forty nights! The rains came down and the waters came up! The rains came down and the waters came up, and the water grew deeper and deeper and deeper until the great flood covered all the earth! The earth was once more formless and desolate and covered with a raging ocean. The earth was once more just like it was before God spoke the world into being. And every bird, every animal, every person, every living being died.

Every bird, every animal, every person, every living being died. What a sad and terrible day! What a sad and terrible and awe-ful day! Where were the green pastures and still waters? The still waters were raging with anger and the green pastures were drowned and gone. Where were the roaring lion and the soaring eagle? Drowned and gone! Where were sister and brother, mother and father, neighbor and friend? Drowned and gone! Drowned in the great flood and gone. Gone forever. Washed away by God’s anger, God’s righteous anger, God’s rightful anger, God’s cleansing anger, God’s sorrowful anger. Washed away by God’s tears ... What a sad and terrible and awful day.

But God remembered Noah. God remembered Noah and his wife and his family in the boat. God remembered the people in the boat, and God remembered the animals in the boat, and God saved them. God brought them safely through the storm. God brought them safely through the flood.

The rain stopped, the wind blew, and the water began to go down. The water kept going down until the boat finally rested on the ground. Noah and his family and all the animals left the boat and stood once more upon the earth.

Then Noah gave thanks to God. Noah gave thanks to God for remembering him and for remembering his family and for remembering the animals that came out of the boat with him.

Noah gave thanks to God and God made Noah a promise. God made a covenant, the very first covenant God ever made. God made this covenant with Noah, and with Noah’s family, and with Noah’s descendants, and with all living beings. God made this covenant with all living beings -- with every person and every animal and every bird. And this was God’s covenant:

I promise that never again will all living beings be destroyed by a flood. Never again will I destroy all living beings. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my promise to you and to all the animals. I will never forget you or your descendants -- even when you fill the earth again with evil. I will never forget you or your descendants or all the animals. I make this covenant with all living beings, and I will not forget!

God made a promise and God did not forget. God has not forgotten us and God will not forget us. God will not destroy all living beings, but God will save all living beings. This is God’s first promise, the promise that encompasses all the rest. God will save us. Not just our souls, but us. Not just people, but all living beings. God will save us and bring peace to the earth. God will save the earth and all living beings in it ...

God has saved the earth and all living beings in it -- people and birds and animals -- not with a boat made of wood, but a cross ...