

I found this called EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW, I LEARNED FROM NOAH'S ARK

1. Don't miss the boat.
2. Remember that we are all in the same boat.
3. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.
4. Stay fit. When you're 60 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big.
5. Do not listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.
6. Build your future on high ground.
7. For safety's sake, always travel in pairs.
8. Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
9. When you're stressed, float a while.
10. Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.

I'm shifting gears today and focusing on the first reading from Genesis about Noah. We get just a snippet, but most of us know the story pretty well. The shortest version I read was "A story of great rainbows in the sky, celebrating the end of a prolonged cruise marked by terrible weather, restless pets and a contentious family." (AMERICA, July 7-14, 2003, p. 22) Well, it's a LITTLE more than that!

First, this is an archetypal tale – telling us about the time when one world ended and another one, deemed lost, emerged from the one before it. The image of the flood is an important one in every human life. It is the sign of that moment in all our lives when there is nothing alive to be seen, nothing solid to cling to, nothing growing to gather. In the floods of life, there is only a plank between us and nothingness – and it is moving. Anyone ever taken down by depression, disease, death, failure, loss, knows the feeling. The world has shifted. The world has disappeared. There is nothing left but us and a gray emptiness. It is a terrible/wonderful moment. Only then is it clear that anything really can happen.

The terrible thing is the sense of loss. What was, is gone. The wonderful thing is the sense of possibility. Perhaps for the first time in life, we are forced to think of other things, other possibilities: of leaving this place, of stopping this work, of separating from this group, of doing something else. It is inventory time. With nothing behind us, nothing in front of us looks all that terrible. It is a moment of beginnings.

We might want to remember that Aquarius the water carrier is carrying the flood-water in a shoulder bag. The lesson is clear: the floods that threaten to drown us are the waters that we carry on our own backs. The waters that rise to our neck are always the waters we spill for ourselves. When jealousy is the water we carry on our backs, it is jealousy that will toss us into a tempest. When greed is the water we carry on our backs, it is profit at any cost that will strand us in the deep. When ambition is the water we carry on our backs, it is ordinariness that will maroon us in a sea of self-doubt. When it is lust that we carry on our backs, it is human degradation that makes us ourselves inhuman. Sickness and death come to every life, but how we respond to them makes the difference between sinking or surviving.

But the flood in the heavens is not a negative sign. It is a reminder of rainbows and doves with olive branches and hot and drying sun. It is the searing recollection that we will be forever given whatever it takes to start over. We are not doomed to free-float forever. If we want to, we can take the flood as promise and as proof that life does indeed come out of chaos. (adapted from Joan Chittister, THERE IS A SEASON, p. 13)

Frederick Buechner gives the story a bit of whimsical twist, as he writes: “The ark rose from its moorings, cumbersome old tub creaking and pitching in the wilderness of waves with 2 of everything down below and a clown for a captain who did not know his port from his starboard. But it stayed afloat, by God, this Toonerville trolley of vessels, clouted from side to side by the waves and staggering like a drunk. It was not much, God knows, but it was enough, and it stayed afloat, and granted that it was noisy as hell and stank to heaven, creatures took comfort from each other’s creatureliness, and the wolf lay down with the lamb, and the lion ate straw like the ox, and life lived on in the ark while all around there was only chaos and death.

“Then, finally, after many days, Noah sent forth a dove from the ark to see if the waters had subsided from the earth, and that evening she returned, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf.....Noah weeps....with wild and irrepressible hope....just a little sprig of hope held up against the end of the world.” (adapted from SECRETS IN THE DARK. A LIFE IN SERMONS, pages not cited)

Second, all of these old tales are about us, of course. The truth is that, left to ourselves, as a race, we ARE doomed – what else can we conclude? -- doomed if only by our own insatiable lust for doom. Despair and destruction and death are the ancient enemies, and yet we are always so helplessly drawn to them like a moth to flame -- as if we are more than half in love with our enemies. Just think of all the Blockbuster movies about death, murder, mayhem and war. Even our noblest impulses and purest dreams get all tangled up – like any war, which we usually enter in the name of human dignity and freedom, the bombs falling on both the just and the unjust and we recoil at the horror of innocent people being killed, except that somehow that is the way the world has always been and is, with nightmare and noble dream all tangled up together. That is the way we are doomed – doomed to be what we are, doomed to seek our own doom. And the turbulent waters of chaos and nightmare are always threatening to burst forth and flood the earth. But the tale of Noah tells other truths as well.

It tells about the ark, for one, which somehow managed to ride out the storm. The ark has always been a symbol of the church. God knows an ark is not much – if anybody knows it is not much, God knows – and the old joke seems true that if it were not for the storm outside, we could never stand the stink within. Yeah, tell me about it – I’ve been working inside the church for over 40 years! It’s a big, fat, leaky bucket – and we are not the most skillful of sailor! But the ark was enough, IS enough. Because the ark is wherever human beings come together as human beings in such a way that the differences between them stop being barriers – the way if we meet people at the wedding, say, of someone we both love, all the differences of age between us, all the real and imagined differences of color, of wealth, of education, no longer divide us but become for each a source of strength and delight, and although we may go right on looking at each other as very odd fish indeed, it becomes an oddness that gladdens our heart, and there is no shyness anymore, no awkwardness or fear of each other. Sometimes even at Mass we can look into each other’s faces and see that, beneath the differences, we are all of us outward bound on a voyage for parts unknown.

The ark is wherever people come together because this is a stormy world, where nothing stays put for long among crazy waves and where at the end of every voyage there is a burial at sea. The ark is where, just because it is such a world, we really need each other and know very well that we do. The ark is wherever human beings come together because in our heart of hearts all of us – white and black, believer and unbeliever, left and right – dream the same dreams, which are of peace – peace between the nations, between the races, between the brothers and sisters – and thus ultimately a dream of love. Love not as an excuse for the mushy and innocuous, but love as a summons to battle against all that is unlovely and unloving in the world. The ark, in other words, is where we have each other and where we claim our sprig of hope.

Noah looked like a fool in his faith, but he saved the world from drowning, and we must not forget the one whom Noah foreshadows and who also looked like a fool spread-eagled up on the cross, cross-eyed with pain, but who also saved the world from drowning. We must not forget Him because He also is here in the ark with us, Brother and Father of us all. So into His gracious and puzzling hands we must commend ourselves through all the days of our voyaging, wherever it takes us, and the end of all our voyages. We must build our ark with love and ride out the storm with courage and know that the little sprig of green in the dove's mouth betokens a reality beyond the storm, more precious than the likes of us can ever imagine. Amen. (adapted from Buechner, OP.CIT)

Oh, THIRD POINT? I gave one up for Lent! But not really.....