

Genesis 6, which is the story of Noah's flood, is one of the popular ones we know. It says that there were 40 days and 40 nights of pouring throughout the world and that was not all; after the flood, the waters did not recede until 150 days later.

Just imagine the world completely under the water for 5 months. We are still talking about hurricane Katrina; tens of thousands of people are still suffering from that disaster. And they say that Hurricane Katrina did last only 8 days (8/23-31, 2005).

So we can imagine the magnitude of Noah's flood. Literally the whole world was destroyed and every living creature on the planet was killed except the ones who were in Noah's Ark.

And here comes the question: How do we make sense out of this story? What is it that we need to hear from this story? We know from this story that the reason for the flood was because people sinned; it was God's first judgment. But if we read chapter 8 verse 21, God makes clear that human beings are just as sinful before the flood as after. Then, what was the point? If God knew the flood wouldn't do any good, why did He use it to begin with? Many questions... but not clear answers!

But one thing: Noah's story sounds like a story of promise. In the Bible, he is one of those few human beings who are described as "blameless"; he walked with God all the time; he was a righteous man. Noah is a hero. But this is not all; in fact, this is the part I like. If you read chapter 9 verses 21 and on, Noah also makes mistakes; he sins; he does what he should not have done. No wonder human beings are just as sinful before the flood as after. But God uses Noah anyway; Noah was God's faithful agent.

Noah was a doer. When you read the story, it is interesting to see that Noah doesn't talk throughout the narratives. He just follows what he is told by God. God says: "Go build an ark for yourself," he doesn't ask a question; he just does it. "Go bring your children and all the animals, a pair of each kind, male and female, and take them into the ark," and he follows. End of story! I don't know if I can or want to be a person like him. No wonder God was using Noah as an agent. Noah was a doer.

In Matthew text, Jesus says just that. Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of my Father will enter. I thought what we need is faith; faith means our words of confession; we say to Jesus, "Jesus, I believe you. I accept you as my personal savior and Lord." Some parts of the Bible teach us just that. But this concluding part of what we call the Sermon on the Mount, which is the core message of Jesus, says faith needs action. We have to show that we try to live our faith. Jesus wants to see "doing," rather than "just saying."

Many Christians think faith is learning about the Bible and they make a lot of effort in Bible studies; that's good but that is not the end of our journey. That is only the beginning. Jesus wants to see some actions on our part; Jesus wants us to push a little further to act. We need to show the world that we are doing something; we are acting on what we believe in.

One day I was walking on a street in Berkeley and saw a sign at the First Congregational Church in Berkeley: "We are a progressive congregation; by progressive, we mean that we want to show action in what we believe. I thought that was very helpful to me.

This is not in the story. But think of this: what do you think Noah and his family had to do when they got out of the Ark on day one? I could see the family cleaning up the mess the flood had left on the earth. Picture them hard working in the middle of all the debris and rubble.

I am very happy that we will collect an offering for the Chinese earthquake victims and Myanmar cyclone survivors. By doing this, we are joining millions of other people in cleaning the mess and rebuilding the communities in those countries. By doing this, we will show our faith; we want to show our compassion; we want to show that we act on what we hear from God.

You may have seen a program called "CNN Heroes." Last week, this particular clip had a woman named Phymean Noun from Cambodia. I just wanted to share with you this pain that I got from this story. "Walking down a street in Cambodia's capital city one day," she said "I finished lunch and tossed my chicken bones into the trash. Seconds later, I watched in horror as several children fought to reclaim my discarded food."

I know we see many homeless people digging through the trash everyday here in the Bay Area too. But just picture that image for a second: after eating your lunch you throw away a couple of chicken bones into a trash and then you see four or five kids fight to rush to get the bones. Wow! After this incredible experience, this-CNN-Hero woman quit her job several years ago and started a school for these poor children at one of the largest trash dump in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Children as young as seven scavenge hours at a time for recyclable materials. They make a few cents a day selling cans, metal and plastic bags if they are lucky.

I don't know anything about this woman's religion. But it didn't matter to me. Today Jesus says, what matters to God is not what we say but whether or not we do what God is telling us to do. To me, the Cambodian woman was not just a CNN Hero but a hero to God.

In a way, our world is still dealing with the aftermath of Noah's flood. There are debris and rubble all over the world, not necessarily coming from natural disasters but from intentional human violence.

But there is hope. The God who trusted Noah and gave him work to do is also giving us a privilege to do the same in this world. What a privilege and blessing to do such works! Certainly, to Noah, surviving the great flood was no picnic. Even after the flood was over, Noah and his family still had their filthy ark to clean up and a messy earth they had to deal with. But they didn't mind doing all this work. They had God's promise they could rely on; they remembered the rainbow God had shown them.

You may have seen on TV the happiness and thrill the Chinese rescue workers had after saving one person's life after several days of earthquake; even though they had lost tens of thousands of people's lives, they kept going through the debris and rubble...and when they found a life, the effort was worth it.

Christian life and church work are just like that; things that are going on in the world are just overwhelming but we try and do what we can to make a difference in this world one at a time. The main thing is that we have God working among us and with us. When we try hard, we will be God's heroes. Amen.