



## Expecting to Be Magnetic: How to Build an Ark

*TEXT*  
*Genesis 6:11–22*

August 5, 2018 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Y. Nishioka

**N**ow the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh,

*you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them."* Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

The story of Noah and the ark is one of the most well-known in the Bible. According to the story, the whole world was corrupt, evil and filled with violence. Of all of humankind, only Noah and his family were good and righteous in God's sight. Looking at the sinfulness of the world, God is fed up and says, "I am going to start all over." So God tells Noah to build an ark — something the world had never seen.

God gives Noah very particular instructions. It is to be made of cypress wood. Seal the wood with pitch inside and out so it will be waterproof. Put rooms in the ark. The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits long and fifty cubits

wide. A cubit is the length from your elbow to the tip of your middle finger, typically about 18 inches. Therefore the length of the ark is about 150 yards — a football field and a half. The width is about 25 yards, about half the width of a football field. God gives Noah specific instructions about the roof, the door and the decks for the ark, and then God tells Noah about all the animals, two of every kind, male and female and every kind of food for Noah and his family and the animals.

Do you remember the story? How long did it rain to flood the whole earth? 40 days and 40 nights. Then for 150 days, they stayed on the ark until the waters began to recede. All total, scholars say it was about a year on the ark — a year, animals of every kind, Noah's family.

We just completed three weeks of Vacation Bible School this summer — one week at Village on Mission and two weeks at Village on Antioch. I remember when our wonderful Vacation Bible School teacher at the Makiki Christian Church in Honolulu, Mrs. Muramoto, was telling us the story of Noah and the ark. Jason, my older brother, was nine years old

and already very logical in his thinking — a natural skeptic. He raised his hand and asked, “Mrs. Muramoto, why didn’t the carnivores eat the other animals?”

Mrs. Muramoto thought and then said, “Maybe God made them vegetarians.”

Jason’s hand went up again. “Well then, where did the poop go?”

Mrs. Muramoto was reaching at this point, and unfortunately, the best she could come up with was: “Maybe God made them not have to poop.”

“For a whole year?” asked Jason incredulously. “So let me get this straight. The carnivores are all vegetarians. And nobody can poop for a year. You know that rainbow, I think God felt bad for not only killing all the people and plants and animals on the earth, but also for making those poor animals and Noah’s family on the ark not poop for a year.”

I understand Jason’s dilemma, but here is the problem with his line of questioning. Jason was reading the Bible as a book of science. The Bible is not a book of science. Nor is the Bible a book of history. The Bible fails in many ways when held to a scientific or historical standard. The Bible is a book of faith. It tells us what to believe, how to believe and how to live.

What struck me about the story of Noah and the ark that never really occurred to me before was that God gave such specific and detailed instructions to Noah. Apparently to God, cubits matter.

I am preaching this series now on the four expectations lined out in the strategic framework for Village Church adopted by our session. The second expectation is that we would be magnetic.

One understanding of being magnetic is that, like God instructed Noah, we would pay attention to the details. Not that we would be obsessed with them, but that we would pay attention to them. When people gift us with their time, we want to treat that as the precious commodity that it is. So, whether it is Village on Mission or Village on Antioch, you should expect music that lifts you and preaching that inspires and liturgy that calls to your heart. Our buildings, our grounds, our parking lot, the classes we teach, the meals we share, our childcare, preschools and the child and family development center, our youth ministry, our trips to Kenya and Haiti and the Dominican Republic and to the Mexico-Arizona border, and our food pantry and clothes closet and ministries with Operation Breakthrough and Faxon Elementary School and Lansing Prison, our website and publications, all this should be done well so that they attract, draw us into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

“Done well” — notice I did not say “perfect.” We are never going to get it perfect. Ministry is always aspirational. But we are going to do our best to do ministry well with intention and thoughtfulness, relying upon God’s grace.

Now here is the impressive thing about being magnetic. Magnets only work when their charges are different. If their charges, their magnetic fields, are identical, are the same, they repel one another. Think about that for a moment. Magnets are only drawn to one another when they are different. When they are the same, they repel one another. This is the scientific truth behind the aphorism “opposites attract.”

It follows, then, that we will only be a magnetic congregation when we welcome differences. That is, in fact, what makes us magnetic. We are not interested in all being the same, singing the same way, believing the same way, behaving the same way, voting the same way, learning the same way, looking the same way, serving the same way. Certainly that would be more convenient and even more comfortable, but we cannot be magnetic if we are all the same. Being magnetic only happens when we do things well and welcome all — not in spite of their differences, but because of them.

When I lived in Atlanta, I worshiped at the Central Presbyterian Church. The church is one of the oldest structures in Atlanta, across the street from the State Capitol building and two blocks away from city hall. That part of the city has many homeless persons living around it.

This particular event happened before I started attending. On any given Sunday, a number of homeless women

and men would come to worship. Sometimes they would come just for the air conditioning, and they are always welcome, but it can be difficult. As many of you know, a number of chronic homeless persons struggle with serious mental illness and at times can be a danger to themselves and to others. But our crew of ushers and our elders and pastors know most of the regular attenders and greet them by name.

On this particular Sunday morning, Buddy Ennis, the senior pastor, was away on vacation. The worship service had already started when a homeless gentleman who was new to the church came in and was greeted and given a bulletin. He walked into the sanctuary and all the way down the aisle and sat in the very front pew, which of course was empty — this being a Presbyterian church. He stood up when the congregation did and sat down accordingly. He seemed to doze off during the sermon, but that is not that unusual for some Presbyterians. He was in no way disruptive.

Then it was time for the offering. And as often happens at Village on Mission and at Village on Antioch, the choir that was seated in the chancel was to sing an anthem. The director of music stood and turned with his back to the congregation and faced the choir. He gestured for the choir to stand, and just as they did, the homeless man sitting right down front, stood too.

Then the organ started playing and the choir director, just like Will Breyspraak or Ryan Main or Matthew Shepard or Elisa Bickers does with us, began to direct. And with every gesture, the homeless gentleman did the exact same thing. When the director gestured to bring in the sopranos, the homeless man did the same. When the choir director signaled the basses to tone down, the homeless man did the exact same. During the entire anthem, he perfectly mimicked every action of the choir director.

As the anthem went on, choir members, all of whom could see both the director and the man on the floor behind him, began to giggle. Of course, this made the choir director annoyed, and he started to gesture even more emphatically — which only caused the homeless man to do the same. Then the congregation started giggling, which annoyed the choir director even more as he was glaring at the choir members who by now were losing it.

The anthem finished with a grand sweep of the arms from the choir director, and the homeless man did the exact same thing. Then the homeless man turned to the Central Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, and he bowed triumphantly. At that point, the congregation broke into applause and rose to their feet cheering. And then the homeless man picked up his bags and strode proudly out of the sanctuary.

When the senior pastor got up to lead worship the next

Sunday, he stood in the pulpit and looked out at his congregation and said, “You know I love you. Oh, I know we have our struggles, but you know I am so proud to be your pastor. But I have never been more proud than when I heard what happened last Sunday. Last Sunday, the Savior of the world Jesus Christ came to worship at Central Presbyterian Church, and you not only welcomed him, you gave him a standing ovation!”

Cubits matter. And we will aspire to be magnetic by the grace of God, doing ministry well — not so that we attract only those who are like us, but so that we would attract those who are different — for that is how we become the body of Christ. For all are invited and welcomed to this place and to this font and to this table, for God has done and is doing marvelous things, and we will sing praises with a new song!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

**This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.**

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.