

What's an Ark and What Does It Do?

Genesis 6-7

May 24, 2009

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Bill Cosby Sketch:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgItTmLzAI4>

'Course Noah had a heck of a job, really. He had to go out and collect all the animals in the world, by two's. Two mosquitoes, male or female. And, uh, he had to keep telling the rabbits, only two, only two, only two.

So we find Noah pulling up the last two animals. Two hippos and he's really in a hurry to get 'em up because he's afraid that the Lord's gonna call him and ask him to do something else and his nerves are shot. This is one heck of a job for a man 600 years old. So we find him pulling up the two last hippos. And of course the Lord does call him there.

[NOAH] Come on fat hippos hurry up. Come on will you please?

[GOD] Noah!

[NOAH] What? What you want?

[GOD] Gotta take one of those hippos out, and bring in another one.

[NOAH] What for?

[GOD] Cause you got two males down there, and you need to bring in a female.

[NOAH] I'm not bringin nothin in. You change one of em.

[GOD] Come on you know I don't work like that.

[NOAH] Well I'm sick and tired of this I've had enough of this stuff. I've been working all day—working on it for days and days. I'm sick and tired of this—

[GOD] Noah!

[NOAH] Yeah?

[GOD] How long can you tread water?

[NOAH] Yeah, well I got news for you. I'm sick and tired of this whole mess. The whole neighborhood's out there laughing at me. They're all having a grand time at good old Noah there. I went out there at my best friend Larry. I've been talking to the Lord, Larry. Larry said, 'Oh, really.' Yeah yeah, Lord, Larry, Larry, Lord. You walked off laughing—and I hear 'em all laughing at me. You know I'm the only guy in this neighborhood with an Ark? People around here laughing. Picket signs walking up and down. I'm sick and tired of this stuff here. People walking around here. 'How you doing Tarzan? How's everything up there?' Sick and tired of this mess here. You supposed to know all and see all. You let me go out there. And bring in a pregnant elephant. You give me no manual for delivery or nothing. Never told me the thing was pregnant. There's good old Noah waitin' underneath the elephant there.

BRRRRROOOOMMM! Right on top!

Sick and tired of this mess here. Had enough all this stuff. For you runnin' around. You supposed to know all and see all. Like I said before, you let me go out there and do all this stuff here. You never even looked in the bottom of that Ark. Have you looked down there? No? Who's gonna clean up that mess down there? Not me!

I tell you I've had enough of this stuff. I tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm letting all these animals out.

[lightning and thunder, then rain]

And I'm gonna burn down this Ark. And I'm going to Florida somewhere. Cause you haven't done nothing. I'm sick and tired of all this mess. You foolin' around. And you haven't done nothing!

And you got it rainin.

It's not a shower is it?

Ok Lord, me and you right? Cause I knew it all the time.

end Bill Cosby sketch

I can kind of relate to Old Noah. God asks Noah to build an Ark and I think He asks me to build a church somehow. I think He asks us to build a church somehow.

Several years ago, I felt like He was *pointing* me downtown.

A year and a half ago, I felt like He was *pushing* me downtown.

There were outrageous circumstances, people with visions, co-workers and open doors. And now, here we are – downtown. I have ideas as to why, but I'm not totally sure why. And well, it makes me feel a bit ridiculous, like Noah. But it's not just church downtown – it's church.

I can't tell you the number of times that I've prayed: "Jesus, surely you've got a better plan for saving the world than the church. I mean, you're the Savior. Why would you want to use the church? God, you are omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. Why would you want potlucks, committee meetings, and a bunch of people singing off-key? And why would you want to use insecure, self-conscious, cantankerous people like me? Surely you have a better plan? Why don't you do it? You change 'em... you build your Ark."

Have you ever thought about just how strange this story is? I don't mean flood geology or how you get elephants on an ark—I mean how strange it is that God would tell Noah to "make it" (*asah* is the Hebrew word). We just read how God "made" (*asah*) all things. God just made space and time, quantum mechanics and general relativity, dry land, the waters above and the waters below. He made crawdads, wombats and water buffalos. He made diamonds, rubies, gold and iron, and He made trees. Do you have any idea how utterly simple a boat is, compared to just one strand of DNA in one tree? So God makes all the hard stuff. He makes the wood for the timber; He makes iron for the nails; He makes Noah. But God has Noah pound the nail.

When I finished my basement, I mapped it out, and I bought the wood. I cut the wood, and I placed the wood, and I would place the nail. And my 7 year-old Coleman would say, "Can I help?" I'd say, "Buddy, come pound this nail." It was always harder with Coleman—and there was a good chance that I'd get hurt by Coleman—but it was a gift to Coleman. I wanted him to share my joy and be made in my image, as we made the basement.

So God makes everything: Heaven and earth, iron and trees, even Noah. He “subjects the world to futility” and yet never loses control. He puts all in its place, including Noah. Then He says, “Hey Noah, come pound this nail. Build an Ark.”

You know, this is the first thing God asks man to build: an Ark for a flood. Why? You realize that God could have just sent the swine flu? Why a flood? Why Noah? Why an Ark? And would God ask us to build an Ark? What’s an Ark?

Genesis 6:6 “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”

Have you ever seen God’s heart? From the “bosom of the Father?” It’s nailed to a tree on a holy mountain, establishing a covenant. Well, our sin hurts God’s heart. It doesn’t say God is angry or furious—but grieved. It’s the same word that’s used for Eve’s labor pains a few chapters before. God is in pain, and creation is in pain.

Well, the Lord is “grieved” and Paul tells us “all creation groans in labor pains, waiting for the revealing of the sons of glory.” Maybe God feels sorrow like a mother in labor feels sorrow and cries out in pain.

Genesis 6:7 “So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

Or: “I have sorrow that I made them, so I’ll blot them out.” That’s God’s judgment: send a flood on the whole thing—blot them out. And yet we’re still here. We’re here, and we’re not blotted out, because of the Ark. It must have been a pretty amazing Ark, not to simply withstand a flood, but to weather the judgment of God.

And you see, that’s the real wonder.

Now I probably need to digress for a minute, because some of you are still wondering at the wrong thing. You’re wondering at the flood, and the world’s largest floating zoo, rather than wondering at the mystery of God’s judgment, and how an Ark of a Covenant could give birth to an entire new creation.

So let me digress for a moment, and talk about science and scripture.

1. Some think this story is like a parable—not to be taken “literally” or “scientifically.” The problem is that other Biblical authors and Jesus seem to take it that way.
2. Some argue that the flood was a local flood. The word for “earth” is also translated “land,” and the word for “Heaven” is also translated “sky.” So the flood covered “the whole land, under the sky.” The water “...covers the highest mountain under the sky to a depth of 15 cubits.” But that’s only 22 feet. “The highest mountain” sounds like a hill under the sky, somewhere in Mesopotamia, not Mt. Everest. Mesopotamia was prone to floods. And it’s interesting that a great number of ancient cultures (especially around Mesopotamia) have similar ancient flood stories.

Recently, two senior scientists from Columbia University found great evidence for a catastrophic

flood around the Black Sea about 7,000 years ago. A massive area of land was suddenly inundated by the ocean, burying that ancient civilization 500 feet beneath what is now the Black Sea.

3. Whether it was the region at the Black sea or the plains of Mesopotamia, some argue that Noah's flood was a local flood, yet the New Testament says "the world perished." So some argue that the flood was global and then come up with elaborate scientific explanations. They call it flood geology. But speaking as an old geology student, it makes little sense to me.

Well, God spoke all creation into existence with just a word. If God wants, He can create a million gazillion billion gallons of water out of nothing and make it go back to nothing with just a word. If God wants to, He can turn water to wine, and five loaves and two fish into a great feast. God can do whatever He wants to do, and I don't know exactly what He did do. And to be honest, I really don't care.

I really don't care if there's an old Ark on the mountains of Ararat. And that's because I'm convinced the real Ark touched this earth on another mountain named Calvary and Zion, and the Glory of that Ark far surpasses any floating zoo.

Genesis 6:7-9 "God says, "I will blot man out." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth."

"Noah" means rest.

When he was born, his father prophesied, "this one will bring us rest."

Like Sabbath – the 7th Day.

Noah is like "Lord of the Sabbath."

And if you work the math, you realize he's the first man born after Adam dies.

Noah is like the Second Adam.

He repopulates the earth.

He even plants a garden and gets naked.

Unfortunately, he's drunk and ends up cursing his descendants. And God admits, "The intention of man's heart is still evil." So Noah is very much a man like us, and yet in verse 9, Scripture says he was "righteous and blameless." But Scripture also says, "No one is righteous," except God, of course... and Jesus.

The book of Hebrews (11:7) tells us, Noah "inherited his righteousness" from someone, like a cloak. So Noah was a man (like us) and yet it's like there was another man, a new man, the Lord of the Sabbath, the Second Adam, covering Noah, working in Noah.

Genesis 6:13 "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence (*chamas – cruelty – injustice – destruction*). And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.'"

The earth was filled with violence—filled. Now there are different types of violence: there's physical

violence, psychological violence, racial violence, economic violence, spiritual violence. Genesis tells us that the earth was full of it – flooded with it. Jesus tells us that when He comes again (and even now) it's "as in the days of Noah."

Well, if the earth is filled with violence, we'd be swimming in it—swimming in it and wouldn't know it. Like the old Chinese proverb: "If you want to know what water is, don't ask a fish." Water is all a fish knows; perhaps violence is all we know.

Gosh, we even have a popular idea that violence explains life. But I bet even Darwin would tell you "violent competition," the "survival of the fittest" doesn't explain life; it explains the limits of life.

It explains death.

Life itself is the opposite of violence, its self-sacrifice, cooperation and communion. Its one molecule, one cell, one member serving all the rest – that's life. But in this world, one life consumes another life like one cell feeds on another cell in a body laced with cancer. The creation is literally eating itself—body and blood—and because we swim in it, we think it's normal. The earth is filled with violence, but soon it will be filled with judgment, and it will be filled with something new.

In Isaiah 11, the prophet foretells the Messiah:

"...with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the viper's den.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

"In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious."

But now the earth is filled with violence.

Genesis 6:16 "Make yourself an ark of gopher 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 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above, and set the door of the ark in its side. Make it with lower, second, and third decks."

The description of Noah's Ark is very similar to the description of the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant (the second thing God asks man to make).

Genesis 6:17-19 "For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. 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 sort into the ark to keep them alive with you."

Now here's a huge miracle that would be obvious to any ancient Hebrew farmer: all these animals go into one big box (an ark) and they don't eat each other.

I mean,

The wolf dwells with the lamb.

The leopard and the goat.

The lion and the ox.

You see, the Ark is a sanctuary governed by a New Covenant, and the covenant is mercy (*hesed*) – covenant love. In the sanctuary of this Ark of the Covenant is the new creation. It's a new community of life.

It is literally the life boat.

Genesis 6:20 "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 sort shall come in to you to keep them alive."

God says to Noah, "Every sort will come in to you to keep them alive." *Come in to you* – the Hebrew is explicit: "Go into the Ark," then, "All will go into you." God talks like Noah himself is the Ark, as if Noah himself built the boat with his own body. What a bizarre idea! And if he did build the boat with his own body, who would pound the nails?

Listen to:

2 Corinthians 5:17 "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."

1 Peter 3:18 "Christ suffered... that he might bring us to God"

--on a holy mountain, for soon the earth will be flooded once again, but not with water (according to Peter), but fire and light – the glorious judgment of God.

Well, Noah entered the Ark and on the seventh day the flood came...judgment came.

Genesis 7:17 "The flood continued for 40 days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth."

“Lifted high above the earth...Now is the judgment of this world and when I be lifted up from the earth,” said Jesus. He was nailed to wood and lifted up as a sign of the Covenant.

Genesis 7:18 “The water prevailed and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters.”

The Ark floated *on* the judgment.

Check it out: God “sends rain on the just and the unjust.” There’s one judgment, but the very judgment that condemns the world is the very judgment that lifts Noah up and out of this world. Noah isn’t saved *from* judgment, but *through* judgment, even *by* judgment. The judgment on this earth is a flood of fire. And our God is a Consuming Fire, and our God is One, and Our God is Love. Whatever is opposed to love will be consumed by love, and whatever surrenders to love will be lifted and filled with love and life and light. In fact, it’s already happening.

John 3:19 “This is the judgment: the light has come into the world. (That’s Jesus.) Whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been done by God.”

That he’s full of God – a new creation.

Well, the waters cover the earth and it’s clear from how the story is told, that God is de-creating. This is creation in reverse. Until Genesis 8:1 when we read this:

Genesis 8:3 “But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. Fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters receded from the earth continually.”

In judgment, God remembers Noah and recreates the world (or perhaps just creates the world). Well, the Ark came to rest on a mountain, a Holy Mountain.

Genesis 9:1 “And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’”

Noah is clearly a picture of the second Adam, but also the first Adam. I mean, Noah is a picture of Jesus, and a picture of us. So Jesus the Carpenter built an Ark of the Covenant, and He lets us—actually He arranges everything for us to—pound the nails. That means that God spoke into the void, making the Heavens and the earth. He separated the waters – above and below. He placed iron in the land, and the

dry land appeared. He made DNA and He made trees. And He said, “let us make man in our own image and likeness.” And He “subjected the world to futility...consigning all men to disobedience.”

Then at just the right time, He grew a tree somewhere near Mt. Calvary on Mt. Zion. He emptied Himself and wrapped Himself in flesh and was place in a wooden box—an ark, a manger. He came into this world as a slave: last and least. Yet He arranged it all – Pilate, Judas, Israel and Rome. And then He laid Himself down on that tree on Mt. Calvary.

Then He says to you, “Give me your violence. Give me your sin.”

God cannot sin, and He doesn’t will sin, and yet when you do sin, you pound the nail, and you reveal God’s mercy. You pound the nail and build an Ark of body broken and blood shed. It may feel like the curse, but it is transformed into the greatest blessing, for when you pound the nail, you reveal God’s mercy. And when you see God’s mercy (for you’ve already hammered the nail) you are transformed into mercy. You are made in God’s image. You become the Body of Christ—even body broken and blood shed. You become the Ark floating in a sea of violence.

You see, we are the Ark that Christ is building, and we help build it for others and with others:

When we suffer violence in Christ’s name—

When we allow our body to be broken and our blood shed—

When we forgive—

When we love as He loved us—

—then we are the Ark: a Community of Life bound in the Covenant of Love, floating on a sea of violence and death.

Noah and the Ark is Jesus and the Church—the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle, the Sanctuary, the New Jerusalem coming down and resting on Mt. Zion: the Church.

The Church is not a building, program or institution; it’s a Community of Life, and it’s a boat. It’s a life boat. And you’re on it not because you chose it, but because He chose you, because He made you his family – body and blood. He made you His Bride. Jesus told us He builds the boat – the life boat. And Jesus told us He would sail it right to the gates of Hell and beyond.

Someone said, “A boat is most safe when it remains in the Harbor, but that is not what a boat is made for.”

Sanctuary, you’re a boat – a life boat. All week, I kept thinking of this scene:

Titanic movie clip #1:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDNxa7_p_Z0

[Rose calls for Jack, and searches for him amidst all the drowning people. Hundreds of people flail in the water. Later, Rose and Jack are huddled together on a piece of debris, floating in the freezing water.]

JACK: The boats are coming back for us, Rose. Hold on just a little longer. They had to row away for the suction and now they’ll be coming back.

[She nods, his words helping her. She is shivering uncontrollably, her lips blue and her teeth chattering. People in the water are screaming for help.]

[A life boat floats on the edge, full of safe people, watching others drown.]

HITCHINS: You don't understand. If we go back, they'll swamp the boat. They'll pull us right down, I'm telling ya.

MOLLY: Aw knock it off, you're scarin' me. Come on girls, grab your oars. Let's go.

HITCHINS: Are you out of your mind? We're in the middle of the North Atlantic. Do you people want to live, or do you want to die?

[Nobody moves. The women won't meet Molly's eyes. They huddle into their ermine wraps.]

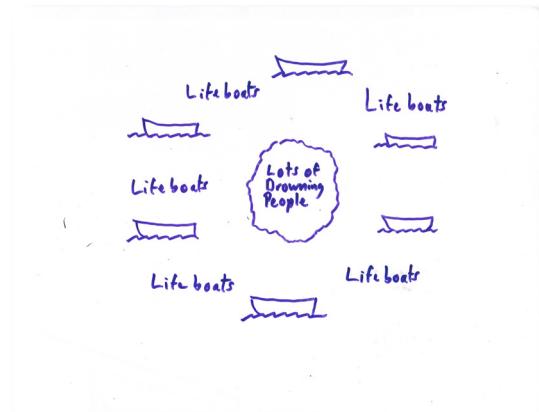
MOLLY: I don't understand a one of you. What's the matter with you? It's your men back there! We got plenty a' room for more.

HITCHINS: If you don't shut that hole in yer face, there'll be one less in this boat!

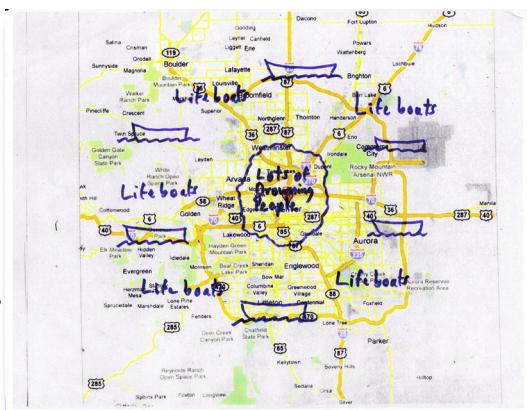
end movie clip

When the Titanic went down, 1,500 people went into the sea. There were 20 life boats. Only one went out to the people in the sea. It looked like this:

A bunch of drowning people surrounded by other people in life boats.



It kind of reminds me of this:



Now this is a gross oversimplification, so don't make much of it. But, by and large, it seems that the folks with the most resources are out here (where the boats were in *Titanic*). And the greatest

concentration of drowning people are in here – the middle. This is where I live – here in the suburbs. This is where I used to be pastor. I remember sitting at my desk and staring at the sea of people (the city) and asking a question. We used to ask it in session. In effect, it was this:

“How can we get our boats--our resources--down to the sea?”

Now, by “resources,” I mean way more than money. Drowning people really don’t need your money or a program or an education, they need you. And not just you, they need a family. They need to be adopted into a new community... a Community of Life governed by *hesed*, Covenant Love.

See, the life boat is not a building, not a program, not a budget... it’s the living body of Christ – the church. People want to do church, but we’re called to be church. People want to do ministry, but first we must be ministry. Do you understand? Y’all are the boat. I think God has called us to sail our little boat downtown into the sea, to pick up folks that are drowning.

This is Central Presbyterian:



We come sailing down here for about two hours once a week.

This is the Asbury building:

It’s not the boat. But we could office there, and we could meet there whenever we want. It would allow us to do much more sailing. (You’ll be hearing much more about that in the near future.)



Well, 20 boats and only one came back (to the people in the sea). Jesus is that one boat, and He sails right into Hell. Saving us, He sank into the Abyss and gave us His life.

In the movie *Titanic*, Jack saves Rose, like Jesus saves his Bride. Rose is high-class; Jack is low-class, but he teaches Rose about love and freedom. He saves her in just about every way a person can be saved. Jesus said, “If you lose your life (for my sake and the gospel’s), you’ll find it. But if you save your life, you’ll lose it.”

Which brings up a fascinating question:

Who needs saving, really?
Who is it that is drowning in a sea of violence and death?
Is it the folks in the water (the last and least)?
Or the folks hiding from the danger of life, in their life boats?
Scribes, Pharisees and rich young rulers?

To be saved, is to love saving. So to be saved, we need to go save. We need to lose ourselves and follow the Savior into the sea.

Titanic movie clip #2:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fe3tyfEVfy0>

ROSE: It's getting quiet.

JACK: Just a few more minutes. It'll take them a while to get the boats organized...

ROSE: I love you, Jack

[Later, Rose is unmoving, just staring into space. She knows the truth. There won't be any boats. She tries to wake Jack, but he is gone. She whispers to him.]

ROSE: I'll never let go. I promise.

[She releases him and he sinks into the black abyss.]

[Hearing voices, Rose rolls off the floating debris and plunges into the icy water. She swims to Chief Officer Wilde's body and grabs his whistle. She starts to blow the whistle with all the strength in her body. Its sound echoes across the still water.]

[In the lifeboat, Lowe whips around at the sound of the whistle and heads the boat in her direction.]

OLD ROSE: Fifteen hundred people went into the sea when Titanic sank from under us. There were twenty boats floating nearby and only one came back. One.

Afterward, the seven hundred people in the boats had nothing to do but wait... wait to die, wait to live, wait for an absolution which would never come.

But now you know there was a man named Jack Dawson, and that he saved me, in every way that a person can be saved.

end movie clip

Well, Jesus saves us in every possible way a person can be saved.

He saves us from this world of violence.

He saves us from condemnation and wrath.

And He saves us from ourselves.

When we row our boat into the sea, seeking to save others, *God in Jesus is saving us.*

When we seek to build the Ark, *God in Jesus is building us.*
When we seek to build the church, *God in Jesus is building us.*

We are the church. The Father asks us to build so we can share His joy, in His image. And as we build, He builds us. We are the church. We are the boat.

The boat is a new community, a communion of love. In this world, it seems foolish, absurd and weak. But that's because this world is filled with violence. Soon, however, the earth will be flooded with a Holy Fire. It will consume this world, but bear us up, and set us down on Mt. Zion and a brand new creation.

For on the night our Lord was betrayed, He took bread and He broke it, saying,

“This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat.”

And in the same manner, after supper, He took the cup and He said,

“This is the New Covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me.”

And so He invites you to come to the Ark of the Covenant, the tabernacle, the sanctuary, the holy place. Confess your sins, believe God's grace... and be the boat. Amen.

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Communion

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Benediction

Prayer: And so, Lord Jesus, we look to you. It scares us, Jesus, but we want to be like you, for you are the one who loves in freedom. You are life. And so, Lord God, we surrender ourselves to you. We pray that you would board your boat, that you would take us to where you want to go. We confess that we're scared, but we know that you are good.

In Jesus name, amen.