

Theological reflection on the Story of Noah and the Flood: Genesis 6:1 – 11:32

Over the course of history, the children of Adam populated the Earth and pushed the boundaries that God had set for them regarding their relationship with his creation. This disobedience caused God to reassert his power and guidance by fashioning a fresh start that would give the rest of humanity a chance to redeem itself. The consequence of this situation was a great flood that effectively ended all of life, but preserved the lives of eight people – Noah and his family. Following this, God made a covenant promise, never again, to destroy the earth.

The purpose of the flood was not to destroy people but to destroy disobedience and sin. A sin that had ravaged the earth and was placing it in a situation that was becoming irrecoverable. God cares about his creation, and it hurts him deeply to see it being neglected or abused. The story of Noah shows that if we don't protect and look after our common home, we are at risk of losing everything, as our current science and ecology warn us we are heading towards.

The issue today is the same. We have neglected and continue to neglect our Common Home. We must look for ways in our everyday life to improve how we care for our Earth, and to heed advice from those who have expertise and devote their time to researching this topic. Sir David Attenborough, for example, has devoted his whole life to protecting the environment and to help all of us to make a positive impact. He says:

"We are at a unique stage in our history. Never before have we had such an awareness of what we are doing to the planet, and never before have we had the power to do something about that."

"Surely we all have a responsibility to care for our Blue Planet. The future of humanity and indeed, all life on earth, now depends on us."

David Attenborough recognises that we have to work more closely together in society and in politics to achieve this.

"Real success can only come if there is a change in our societies and in our economics and in our politics."

COP 26

"This is the World's last best chance to stop Climate CATASTROPHE" – John Kerry (President Joe Biden's Climate Envoy).

COP 26 is the 2021 United Nations' Climate Change Conference. COP itself stands for Conference of the Parties. The meeting will be held in Glasgow between the 1st and 12th November and will be the 26th since its inception.

It is the global UN Summit focused on climate change and how countries around the world are planning to tackle the ongoing situation in which we find ourselves. It is attended by countries that signed the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1994. It is meant to be the most significant conference since the 2015 Paris Agreement.

2015 Paris Agreement

This has been at the heart of all recent COP conferences, this was a big international agreement to tackle climate change and was agreed and signed by leaders in 2015 when 195 countries attended COP 21 in Paris. The document outlined that nations must:

- Reduce the amount of harmful greenhouse gases produced and increase the use of renewable types of energy such as wind/solar/wave power.
- Aim to keep the global temperature below 2 Celsius/3.6 Fahrenheit and attempt to limit it to 1.5 Celsius.
- There will be a review every five years to assess how each respective country is doing.

The most controversial aspect was an assurance to spend \$100 billion a year in climate finance to help poorer countries by 2020 – with a commitment to further finance in the future. However, under Donald Trump's presidency the US pulled out of the Paris Agreement, but current US President Joe Biden wants to re-join it.

What was the last COP?

COP 25 took place in Madrid in November 2019. However, there were many issues unresolved following this gathering, and many countries stated they left with more questions than answers. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres felt 'disappointed' by how little was achieved. It was the longest COP on record and lasted two days longer than planned, with the most memorable aspect being Greta Thunberg's speech.

Who Sponsors this?

Previous summits have been sponsored by companies that focus heavily on Fossil Fuels, however, Alok Sharma MP (President of COP 26) decided that sponsors "have to have real commitments in place to help them reach net zero in the future." New sponsors include National Grid, NatWest, Sky and Scottish Power, to name but a few.

Why is it important to us and our faith?

Pope Francis has stated numerous times how important it is to protect our Common Home, saying in his Laudato Si encyclical "I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all." There are hopes that this conversation the Holy Father is urging us to have, could be initiated at COP 26.

What can we do?

UN Climate Chief, Christiana Figueres has said:

"If Governments put health, nature regeneration and climate action at the core of every decision they make in recovery from the pandemic, we can emerge as a stronger and more resilient society, and ensure that COP 26 puts us on track to a safer climate future."

I found this to be an incredibly potent sentiment from the Climate Chief. Action to tackle climate change from governments and large corporations is very important, but we can all make a difference in our daily lives to help to preserve our Common Home:

- Everything you buy has an impact on the earth when it is made and when it is finished with – keep the environment in mind when spending your money
- Plastic is a major pollutant - try to avoid using plastic as much as possible
- Vehicle emissions contribute significantly to pollution - try to walk, cycle and use public transport
- Saving water helps - turn the tap off while you brush your teeth
- What we eat also has an impact on the environment – try growing your own vegetables
- Recycle and re-use as much as possible
- Pick up litter if you see it on the street

Some larger social action activities could involve:

- Sign petitions and write to your local Member of Parliament asking what he or she is doing to tackle climate change
- Organise meet-ups within your local community and organise volunteer groups to help pick up litter, plant vegetables etc.

Further Resources to check out:

- CAFOD: Secondary and Youth pack - cafod.org.uk/Education/Secondary-and-youth-resources/Climate-change-photopack
- Making your School Green - cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/environment/making-your-school-green

All of the above can help!

Remember this quote by Sir David Attenborough:

"The question is, are we happy to suppose that our grandchildren may never be able to see an elephant except in a picture book?"

Closing Prayer

Almighty God,
 You are present in the whole universe, and in the smallest of all of your creatures.
 You protect us and watch over us in our daily lives
 to protect this world that you have created for us.
 We give you thanks for this Common Home that we share,
 we ask you to watch over us as we endeavour to change our ways
 and try to help in whatever ways we can,
 we ask that you watch over our political leaders at COP 26,
 and inspire them to make the right decisions
 that will put us in the best position to care for our Earth.
 Help us renew the world that supports us,
 help us listen to each other so we may work together more effectively,
 and guide us to love our Common Home again.
 In Jesus' name,
 Amen.

*We must never forget that the natural environment is a collective good,
 the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone.
 Pope Francis*

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