

The breath of life

■ **READ:** A selection from Genesis 6:11–9:13

The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings; everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.

■ **REFLECT:**

The wickedness is too much to bear. Cruelty and violence are overwhelming. Everything is corrupt to the core: “every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

Fed up, God demolishes it. He drowns it in rain. Water, murky water, swallows up the whole of God’s creation. What was once a lush landscape had been marred by the evil of people, so God buried the whole thing in water.

Only Noah and his family and a sampling of animals survive. And even they are powerless, reliant on God’s mercy to stop the rain and begin again. The lonely ark drifts on the vast expanse of water.

Until the rains stop, and the deep holds back its fountains. Still the ark drifts.

The waters subside. But still the ark drifts. A bird sent out returns, finding no place—not a single twig—to alight on for even a moment.

The waters recede further, though not enough to see more than the tops of mountains. No grassy plains, no flower-strewn meadows, no tree-lined valleys. Just rocky peaks.

Noah sends out another bird. He doesn’t hold his breath. It may very well return bearing no sign of life. But wait—what’s that in its beak? An olive leaf, smooth, fragrant, redolent with life. Hope is born.

■ **PRAY:**

Lord, I understand the impulse to wipe everything out. Sometimes the evil is so prevalent that destroying it entirely is the only way to eliminate it. And yet you promise not to destroy all flesh again. Instead, you’ve made another way. In Jesus, we have the hope of new life. Come soon, Lord. Amen.