



“My Bow in the Clouds”

Rev. Adam Blons

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Throughout Lent, we will be exploring God’s promises in scripture. Sometimes, we get stuck worrying about what we believe and are supposed to do, forgetting that God’s faithfulness to us matters, too. Today’s reading comes at the end of the story of Noah and the flood, after the ark is filled with animals, after the waters rise about the mountain tops, and after the rain finally stops. We think of this as a story about what happened to Noah and his family, but today’s reading reminds us that this is also God’s story. Notice the promise God makes and what is different because of it.

Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

May these words be to us our light and our life.

Thanks be to God.

Do you know where Noah kept his bees? In the Ark hives. How did Noah see the animals in the Ark at night? Flood lights.

Noah sent the animals to, “go forth and multiply.” A pair of snakes replied, “we can't multiply, we're adders” -- so Noah built them a log table (I know John Schue would have appreciated that one).

The story of Noah and the flood is more likely for us to be the punchline of a Dad joke, rather than inspire our faith. After growing up with this story, many of us have turned away from anything resembling the God described in it. The God who, in chapter 7 saw all the terrible things people were doing and felt, “sorry that he had made humankind.” The God who therefore decided to “put an end to all flesh.” And the God who made it rain and rain until “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.” Yikes! Who wants to believe in a wrathful God who uses power like that? Even with God’s promise at the end of the story to never again destroy the world, many of us still find ourselves looking over our shoulder to be sure this violent God hasn’t somehow followed us to church. This is not the same God of mercy, love, forgiveness, and redemption described in other parts of the Bible, from the story of Jesus. Or is it?

There are many reasons why we might discount, discredit or distance ourselves from the destructive God in this story, except that today’s passage makes it clear God has changed. This is where God’s more intimate and redemptive relationship with creation begins. Because of God’s promise, never again are we cut off.

We tend to describe God in absolute but often static terms like boundless, everlasting, infinite, and eternal. And yet, looking through the story leading up to God's promise, notice how connected, how present, how relational God is with creation. First, in chapter 6, before the flood, God notices the suffering and wickedness of humanity. God feels responsible for the mess and is full of regret. "It grieved him (God is gendered here) in his heart." It is not just humanity, but God that needs a do over. The flood is not literally the destruction of all life, but the submerging and release of regret, wickedness, and suffering, a spiritual release, a baptism, a rebirth not only for creation, but for God. Go back and read Genesis Chapter 7 to get a sense of the power of the water. And there, amid the cleansing quiet of the deep, it says, "God remembered Noah and all the animals in the ark." Cleansed of regret, God remembered what was important. The new creation begins with an awakening of compassion. God causes the winds to blow and the waters to subside ensuring that the ark survives. It is then that God makes the promise to Noah we find in today's passage. "I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you...never again shall all flesh be cut off."

Never again.

Never again will humanity be left to figure out its own wickedness.

Never again will those who suffer be alone.

Never again will evil go unchecked.

Never again will creation be cut off from God.

The rainbow is to be the sign, a reminder of this covenant, this new relationship between God and creation. But a reminder for whom? Listen again, "I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the

earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature.”

The rainbow is a reminder to God that God’s relationship with creation has changed, that God was changed by the flood. It even appears that God sees the short sightedness of the flood itself. The bow in the clouds signifies a new more intimate relationship between God and creation. It stretches between heaven and earth, holding God accountable to be faithful to every generation, to every living thing, to you and me, to show us, teach us, lead us, and to always be with us. The rainbow is a reminder of God’s promise.

I was thinking about actual rainbows as a sign of God’s promise. Even though we associate them with rain, we don’t see them with every storm. To us they are rare and special. You might know that a rainbow is caused by sunlight entering a water droplet and bending. The light reflects off the inside of the droplet, separating into its component wavelengths--or colors. When light exits the droplet, it makes a rainbow. We see the different colors present in the light. Then I realized, just because we don’t see a rainbow after it rains, all those colors are still present in the light. In fact all those colors are always present. In this way, the rainbow is a reminder of the constant presence of God’s vibrant, multi-hued, responsiveness to the world that bends through the tears of fear, suffering, and loss to remind us that we are never cut off. All that is alive is sustained by that light and is infused with God’s promise.

We worship a God who is responsive and faithful to the world, able to change to meet the ever changing needs of the world, even radically enter it through Jesus,

through you and I. This mythical flood story might give a glimpse of who people once thought God was, but it also reveals who God is becoming. That becoming is the flowering of God's promise to all creation, all people, all animals, all birds, all life that never again will it be cut off. Amen.