

Do not be complacent of the Rainbow (Genesis 9:8-17)

Sunday Morning 10:00am – 18th February 2024

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark (1:9-15):

Glory to you O Lord

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

This is the gospel of the Lord

Praise to you O Christ

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.'

<Prayer>

<Marriage Vows – Marriage Preparation Day>

Blessing of the Rings

*Heavenly Father, by your blessing
let these rings be to husband and wife,
a symbol of unending love and faithfulness,
to remind them of the vow and covenant
which they have made this day
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

The couple's rings are symbol of the vows they have taken. They remain for life, or as long as the vows are faithfully kept. On the wedding day it's all romantic and sentimental, a lovely moment indeed. But the serious words are telling: '*a symbol of unending love and faithfulness, to remind them of their vow and covenant.*'

The decision by God to send a rainbow as the sign of *His* covenant might seem a little sentimental too. Which child has not drawn a sweet picture of the ark, the animals and the colourful sky? But remember the scene, as Noah and the whole smelly lot of them, are finally released from the vessel which has protected them. From the water comes life, like a new birth and a new baptism. **After sending such destructive judgement, I wonder how God feels now, as he sees them on the dry ground?** The moment is captured in memorable words:

Then God said to Noah, '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. **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.'**

This is where we get a window into the heart of God. A covenant is technical language for an opportunity which *God makes* for a promise so deep and necessary that we call it a vow. God's ability and awesome power to undertake *anything he wishes*, is offered to humanity on an equal footing. Here God shows humility in himself, besides His power, and breathtaking trust in us too. Remarkable.

If I image the scene myself, what I get here is God being a bit upset with what he has had to do with this global flood. I don't think he is regretful, for God cannot make bad decisions, but certainly something like '*I really don't want to have to do that again.*' Such destruction upon the Earth, an Earth which was once seen as good and pleasing across the evening and the morning, is now wiped-over in a way that I think left God feeling a bit desolate. **So this rainbow is an emotional symbol, as much as a seal of the covenant promise He makes.**

As I read the next verses, consider a rather wounded God who wants to make sure that something eternally better has to come out of this cataclysm.

'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you. This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature that is on the earth.'

Get the opening words 'As for me.....' It is as if God wishes to tell himself something. You can read it as God wishing to be accountable for his destructive power which he has had to use and really didn't like doing so. **But to whom can God be accountable?** When we make a vow, we give away something of ourselves, by faith and in humility. **The fact that God makes this covenant vow to *himself*, yet before Noah and therefore all flesh on the Earth, is a very humble act indeed.** This rainbow, this bow, is a reminder to God, *given by himself for himself*, that he can't deal with sin like that again.

<pause>

From that point God seems to say, 'I will not destroy the sinner, but I will destroy the sin instead.' Salvation history takes a massive turn at this point. From here God must find another way to draw people back to himself. **Look at what unfolds in scripture thereafter – relationships where Almighty God the creator becomes the creator of redemption,** in a people set as his own. The whole lineage of Abraham, the land and those blessings is about to open up in the next chapters of Genesis. God shall issue more covenants yet. From employing creation's most destructive forces as his method, instead God seems to go into families, hearts and minds as his new means.

Yet God's power is not diminished by doing so. Compare a moment of your own destructive anger with the strength required to take it on the inside and do the graceful and constructive thing instead (and for the seventy-seventh time). Whoever said tolerance and patience were easy? Have you ever boiled over and regretted it? I have. Never mind being alone or at home screaming at the walls, bad though that can be, try raging in public! **For God also, it's everyone watching, all flesh now invited to hold him at his word as the God of grace 'slow to anger and of great kindness'.** From here on, *'he requires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live'.*

How many generations have passed since Noah? An untold number. Yet the covenant made that day still remains in place. **Earlier I said that this isn't just a children's story, but in a way it is.** One of the mantras I kept pushing onto my children in their younger years is that it takes much more courage to admit than it does to deny. Honesty must always get it's reward, usually hot chocolate.

To confess and be forgiven by God is an avoidance of his destructive power, that otherwise would have been visited upon you. Thank heavens we live this side of the Ark. We have the time in this fleshy life, a chance to confess in these limited years, and to do our best to live apart from sin.

As I wrote in my Ash Wednesday reflection, the cross will not take away your sinful nature. The cross is a means for dealing with the constant failure, if you attend to it while you can. And I don't just mean a weekly hour in church before the priest, when you can make it along. For all of our lives, each day, we live perpetually under the rainbow of God's reserved destructive power, whilst we still have this body.

Like marriage, in this life, the covenant remains in place *‘till death us do part’*. Recall God’s summary: *‘an everlasting covenant between God and every living creature’*.

God once wrought his destructive power in nature as a flood, but since that day **God has reserved his destructive power to a further point – to the point of death.** Like the boundary of sea and land, so the boundary of life and death gives us time to build a vessel of faith to carry us while we live.

The season of Lent brings these discomfiting thoughts for a certain length of time. It’s a few weeks set aside for a particular focus on repentance, as met with the graceful love of God Almighty. **So use the weeks well, and don’t be complacent of the rainbow.**

Amen