

February 22, 2015

Genesis 9:8-17

- 8** Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,
9 "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,
10 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.
11 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."
12 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:
13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.
14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,
15 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.
16 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."
17 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."

Psalm 25:1-10

- 1** To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.
3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.
5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.
6 Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!
8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.
10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

1 Peter 3:18-22

- 18** For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,
19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,
20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.
21 And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Mark 1:9-15

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

10 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.

11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,

15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Father,
God's Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit:
Amen.

For those of you who spend any time hiking, you know that many trails utilize mile stones, historical markers, and educational posters to help trekkers along the way. With mile stones, we may know how far we've come. With historical markers, we may know who else was here. With educational posters, we may know about the ecology of the particular environment. Some trails incorporate rails and stairways, though the best trails retain a sense of natural beauty even as a clearly worn path shows the way into the unknown ahead.

Lent is one of these trails, well-worn from the feet of the saints throughout time and space. Some form of this Lenten trail has been travelled for two thousand years, from Jerusalem to Japan, from Galilee to the Germany, from the Holy Land to every land, God's church walked the journey of Lent, toward the terrible yet wonderful cross, holding to the promise of light in the midst of penetrating darkness.

Because our forebears walked this walk so well, the path is well cleared for us who follow, with many markers along the way. There's much to note as we journey toward the cross; in fact, much of what we see helps to highlight God's work through the cross of Jesus Christ. For our Lenten journey here at CLC, each Sunday we will consider one aspect of the

cross. Today, we see the work of the cross as peace and promise.

There's a long history of God's promise of peace. God created us in the garden of Eden, a word in Hebrew that means delight, and in our rebellion we went from a delightful peace to sin and struggle. Throughout history, God promised peace and the whole of humanity chose instead violence and strife. And even so, with Abraham and Ruth, with David and Esther, God brought a promise of peace. Today's reading from Noah gives us a key into how God makes this promise, a vision for the kind of peaceful future that God promises. Here again the words from Genesis: "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."

During my time as an elementary student in Sunday school, this story of the rainbow appeared again and again. We see rainbows and remember that God promised to no longer destroy the earth or any of the living things left on the earth. This phenomenon of light refracted through water serves as a reminder of God's gracious love, of God's

promise for peace. What wonderful imagery. A rainbow to remind us that God's rain will never again drown us nor destroy the earth.

Yet, there's something else in here, something that's difficult to access for those of us separated from a hunter/gatherer way of life, for a society whose weapons technology has taken us far beyond bows and arrows. You see, when God sets a bow in the clouds, this is an explicit image of God forsaking the divine war machine. God has hung up his weapon of choice. By leaving the bow in the clouds, God chooses to forsake violence against others as a method of recreation. No matter the extent of our sin. No matter the depth of our wrong. No matter what,

God will not use violence against us, God will not destroy creation, not even to save creation.

And yet, humanity continues to harm creation, piece by piece. We continue to consume and not recycle, to strip away the earth to abuse her minerals and pollute her atmosphere. We guzzle so much oil that it spills onto land and sea, destroying habitats and choking out the life of innocent flora and fauna. In our relationships, we cause divisions along lines of race and sexuality, ostracizing those unlike us rather than embracing them as unique perspectives of God's image. And toward ourselves, we too prefer pride to humility and at the same time tend to loathe rather than love the person whom God made us to be for this world.

We need change. We need transformation. We need some sort of reset button. Gosh, I loved the reset button on video games growing up, especially as I was learning to play the original Mario Brothers on my brothers Nintendo Entertainment System. As I learned to run, jump, and throw fireballs King Koopa, all in order to save Princess Peach, I inevitably made a mistake. Running down the bottomless pits.

Jumping on to the fanged flowers known as Piranha plants. Getting wrecked by King Koopa. But thanks to that reset button, we could start over with a new future. You had new life as the same character but with a future no longer determined by the past, no longer devastated by our former mistakes. The reset button gave us a new life and a new future, one

open to the kind of peace and promise available to us from the Edenic beginnings.

The cross operates as something of a reset button for creation. Rather than destroying all of creation, we as characters get to live brand new lives in the midst of God's good creation. God's promise remains open to us, as does a future where we might live the fullness of God's kingdom intended for us. We needed reformation. We needed to start over in this world God created for thriving, for delight. Rather than destroy us and start over, rather than seek violence against creation, Christ instead took the destruction upon himself that we might have forgiveness in his death, that we might find new life in

his resurrection. Jesus faced our violence with God's peace, and in that God's promise finds fulfilment.

The cross is about God's commitment of promise and peace to us. God remained so committed to keeping the bow in the clouds that Jesus took the pain of redemption upon himself. Rather than remove the bow from its hanging place, Jesus instead hung upon that bow to ensure peace between God and humanity, to ensure that God kept God's promise of a future to all the world. God hurts so deeply for creation's redemption that in Jesus God chooses to take the pain of the process upon God's very self. That's the peace and promise of the Cross.

In this Lenten journey, we walk toward the cross as recipients of that peace, as those who live today here in the promise assured by Christ's life, death, and resurrection two thousand years ago. Part of our reflection, then, must include what God went through to make that peace, what God suffered to keep that promise.

That place is the cross, where God took the suffering of the world upon his shoulders to prevent our own suffering from determining our future. The cross, where violence finds an end when God chooses to submit to suffering rather than take the bow from the clouds. Because, you see, the cross is the place where our violence finds an end in God's peace. After Noah's flood, God's promise to hang

the bow named what we did not yet know: that a future accomplished by violence could never have peace.

What we find in the cross is that, even when we are violent, God responds with peace. When we try to control the future for our own selfish ambitions, God ensures the goodness of the future through a reaffirmation of an ancient promise. Rather than bring violence on us, God instead brings peace and hope. As the images of God walking the path of Christ during Lent, how might we live our own lives with this kind of peace and promise that we see in the cross?

Perhaps we, too, can hang our bows in the clouds. We carry with us so many harsh words, so

much anger and frustration, such dissatisfaction and despair. When it comes to creation, we carry with us incredible power for destruction. When it comes to one another, we hold in our hands vast potential for division. When it comes to ourselves, we hold such potential for derision.

But this Lenten season is one of repentance, one of hanging our bows in the clouds, of turning away from violence and toward the peace and promise of the cross. As we walk toward Good Friday, let's commit to peace. Let's trust in the promise of God. Let's, in the image of God, hang our bows in the clouds. Amen.