

Focus: Baptism is the sign of God's yes to us and creation.

When it was first constructed, the capitol building in Washington, DC looked very different from how it does today. The main thing missing was the huge dome or rotunda that lines the DC skyline, which was not built until years later. In fact, they were still working on it during the Civil War, that terrible conflict in which over 600,000 Americans lost their lives to preserve the Union and end slavery. There is a story that, faced with such a conflict, President Lincoln was asked whether it was really worth the time or expense to build the capitol rotunda. According to the story, Lincoln responded, "If people see the Capitol *going on*, it is a sign we intend the Union shall *go on*."

Our Old Testament story this morning speaks of another story of terrible conflict: the flood. Noah's ark is painted all over nurseries and depicted in children's bibles. This probably would have surprised Noah and the people and creatures who lived through this flood because it must have been a very scary time. God gets so upset with sinful human beings that he creates a destructive flood, rain of 40 days and 40 nights to wipe out everyone except Noah and his family, and of course the 2 animals of every kind that make for the adorable nursery decorations.

What can we learn from this frankly disturbing story? First, it has to be said: God takes sin and evil very seriously. If you are troubled by the particular solution of this story, I don't blame you; I think many of us are. But I will say this: as human beings, don't we want a God who takes evil seriously? I'm not just talking about the sins that society obsesses about: cussin', carousin', carryin' on, and what have you. But in a world where truly terrible things happen to people of all ages and all backgrounds all the time, don't we want a God who isn't ok with that? No matter what else you might say about this story, a God who can get angry is a God who *cares*. The story of the flood is about God who cares about us and creation: more, God who *loves* his creation so much that he won't let it simply destroy itself.

Second, there is another side of this story. Why do the flood waters subside? You have to go back to verse 8:1: "But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided."

Why do you think Genesis tells us God *remembered* Noah and the animals with him? Do you think God somehow *forgot* about them? I mean, other than Noah and people and animals on the ark, there's not a lot going on to worry about right now! No, when God *remembers*, it isn't just about calling to mind. When God remembers, it's a call to action. Notice that in the very same verse, *as soon as God remembers Noah and the animals*, God acts, things happen, the flood stops.

All of this comes together in the most beloved part of the story: the rainbow. ¹²God 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: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I 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. ¹⁶When 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.”

We often think that the rainbow is a sign for us. And it is, more on that in a second. But in the story, God says, “when the bow is seen in the clouds, *I* [God!] will remember my covenant between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.”

The rainbow is a reminder for God. It is a reminder of God’s covenant, God’s deal or pact with humanity and *all* creatures. It is a reminder for God of his great love for humanity and *all* creatures. And when God remembers, God acts. Every day, God provides sun to warm the earth, rain to make things grow, oxygen to breathe. As God tells Noah, “²²As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” The rainbow is a reminder to God and to us of God’s *yes* to creation. Every time we see the sun rise in the morning or set in the evening, every time we see plants sprout up or leaves change color, every time we see raindrops land on the earth, or a rainbow clear away the clouds, it is a reminder to us and to God of our covenant, our relationship between us and our fatherly creator and provider that God’s good creation will go on. Living in covenant with the God of the rainbow means caring for our fellow human beings and our fellow creatures, caring for all of creation, siding with the forces of life and wholeness against destruction and decay.

These promises of life are completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ. When God saved us and all creation once and for all from sin, evil, the devil, and death, he did it not through anger or wrath or a death-giving flood, but through grace, forgiveness, and the self-giving love of his Son on the cross.

Baptism is our ark. Through the waters of baptism, we are joined to Jesus. As Noah’s family and all the animals were saved along with him, so we and all of creation are saved through the righteousness of Jesus.

In baptism, each of us is named and claimed by God. Baptism is the sign of our covenant, our relationship with God. In baptism, we were washed and marked with the sign of Jesus’s cross. Just as God *remembered* his beloved Son Jesus and raised him on Easter morning, so in baptism God remembers all of us and will raise us to everlasting life, too.

Just as the rainbow is the sign of God’s *yes* to creation, that life will go on, baptism is the sign of God’s eternal *yes* to all of us: to our lives, to our future, to our special status as beloved children of God. In scary times, when the floods of life come, whether those floods are temptation like Jesus faced in the wilderness, the floods of a pandemic, or the floods of facing the hour of our death, we can hold onto this sign of our baptism and remember God’s promise to us that we are not forgotten, that God has promised to *remember us* and *to act* with resurrection and forgiveness. And that life: new, eternal, forgiven, flooded by Jesus’s love will go on. **Amen.**