

## Rainbows Were Made to Color

[We colored rainbows in church today]

When it rains it pours. We use that old saying now and again to describe the experience of too much of something all at once. "Pouring rain" is the kind that comes faster than the ground can soak it up, turning streets into rivers and flooding every low place.

Sometimes we can be happy for pouring rain. Sometimes the problems it causes are easily outweighed by the benefits it brings. But more often than not, we speak this phrase when we are weighed down by too much bad news and the storm clouds have lingered for so long that we wonder if we will ever feel the warm rays of the sun again.

I think many of us may feel that way this morning. On top of all the other bad news in the world, on top of violence in the Middle East, hunger in Africa, uncertainty in world economies, difficult events in our own lives --on top of all that we must deal with a tragic death in our community, a death that makes no sense whatsoever to anyone. When it rains it pours.

Of course we can tell ourselves that suffering and death and tragedy should be no surprise to us. It was only just on Wednesday, after all, that many of us began the Lenten journey with ashes on our foreheads as a sign of our mortality. Ashes vividly marked us as dust, and to dust we shall return. But that doesn't take away any of the grief, or pain, or guilt, or anger, or helplessness we feel. **We need another sign**, another promise that can somehow help us remember that above the storm clouds the sun continues to shine.

In these first Sundays of Lent, we will be hearing about covenants in the readings from the old testament. Covenants are agreements that bring about a relationship based upon a commitment or promise. There can be covenants one person makes with another but the bible mainly tells us about covenants that God makes with people.

Most of the stained glass windows on the north side of the sanctuary illustrate these covenants, these **promises** of God, and today we focus on the covenant God makes following the great flood. Never again will there be a flood like this one. Never again, will water destroy the earth. And as with all covenants or promises, there needs to be a sign that serves as a reminder of the terms. And the sign of this covenant is none other than a bow, a battle bow- set in the sky- drawn and aimed - but away from the earth toward the heavens themselves.

A sign is an essential thing. It is not the promise but it represents it in a real way. Think about a wedding ring. It is given as a sign of the love one person has for another. It is not the love itself but it does represent it in the most powerful of ways. When times are hard, when difficulty or even a betrayal threatens the relationship, sometimes it is the ring, the sign of the promise, that gets a couple through and reminds them that the promise of their love is stronger than the hardship they face.

The sign of the rainbow is a reminder of a promise. A promise that God will not give up on creation even though it has been dirtied by sin and selfishness. Remember that is

how the story started. Some might think that God sent a destroying flood in a fit of righteous rage but it was much more an act of grief. Genesis 6:5 says,

The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it **grieved** him to his heart.

This is a crying, grieving, hurting God who responds to the brokenness of creation with a do-over. REboot and begin anew. But it becomes immediately clear that not even a flood, not even a torrent of water, can by itself cleanse the human heart. We remain broken. We remain vulnerable to the threat of death. The flood was not a cure. **Sin survived in the ark** but the rainbow is a sign that God will not give up on this world. God will not give up on us.

God continues to make more covenants with the people and we will hear about them in the weeks to come but they are all rooted in God's commitment, God's love for a broken world. Despite all that happens, God is determined to hold on to us and to find a way to bring us home.

Today we get to see the sign of this commitment in action. Today in just a few moments we will pour water over Nora as a sign of God's new covenant with her and all creation. In Jesus, God has entered into our world flooded with grief and pain, with heartache and suffering and he has said **I will not let these things have any power over you**. I will take the sting of death upon myself. I will endure the hardship and suffering of sin in my body. I will enter into the watery grave with you so that you will not have to be afraid or alone.

And then, God says, **I will triumph over it**. I will take all that death can dish out and drown its power with a resurrected life that does not end. By the grace of God, **we** have this promise and we have baptism as its sure sign. It is a sign that even if we forget, God does not forget and God will not give up on us.

The promise doesn't take away the pain of grief. But the promise helps us to heal. With time and love we can recover from grief and can hold fast to the promise of being united to the resurrect of Jesus from the dead. **And in this way, death loses its ultimate power.**

A wise man once said, "The only death we have to fear we have already died in our baptism." WE have been united to the death and resurrection of Jesus. God has washed us, God has cleansed us - and God will give us the strength to overcome tragedy and suffering and sinfulness. Let us not give in to the temptation to believe death can win. It has not. It will not. It can not.

When it rains, it may indeed pour but God is with us in the storm and the signs of this promise are all around us. WE are washed with them, we will eat and drink them, and we will take them with us into the days ahead. The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near. Turn to God and believe the good NEWS! God's loves you and nothing that can ever change that.