

THE RAINBOW CONNECTION

[based on Genesis 9:8-17]

The story of Noah may be one of the most memorable stories in the Bible. In this story, we hear the familiar voice of God speaking to us in a new way. As I was studying this passage, the words, "I will remember," kept rising to the surface.

After following God's lead in the construction of the Ark, and the enduring turbulence of the flood-waters, Noah and his family were given permission to leave. However, God's work wasn't quite finished.

Shortly after Noah's family left the Ark, God issued the commandment that he gave to Adam and Eve: "Have many children and fill the earth with your people." (Gen 9:7) How could those departing, populate the earth, as Adam and Eve and their descendants did, worrying that another flood might come?

After all, while the flood was cleansing, it did not completely cleanse the world from sin. Human beings will continue to mess-up and get it wrong. Might God send another flood, and repeat the action?

However, God alleviated their concern of another possible flood, through a Covenant He initiated. This Covenant was not only for human-beings, but for all of creation. God declared that the visible sign of the Covenant, the rainbow, would help everyone remember His promise, not to flood the whole earth again.

Sherry and I remember a vacation we took one summer, to Myrtle Beach. We had only been there for a few hours. Our vacation started off sunny, but it was rather muggy and uncomfortable. The weather-man predicted storms, but looking outside, it was hard to believe that it would happen.

By 3 o'clock in the afternoon, things changed, drastically. The air increased the level of humidity even more, and you felt that you would drown just walking through it. The sky was turning ugly. Huge, dark clouds were rolling in and soon the sun was totally obliterated. It was almost as dark as night, but it was late in the afternoon. Suddenly, the clouds burst and huge drops of rain began to fall.

Lightening flashed through the heavens and our hotel vibrated with each crash of thunder. The rain was so heavy that it was impossible to see across the road. Rivers of water ran down the driveway into the street.

There was a loud **crack** and the power went off...no more electricity for a while. We sat in darkness, waiting for the storm to pass. Little by little, the rain began to diminish. The clouds lightened and the sun came out, its rays glistening in the gentle rain that still fell.

"Look, over the ocean! Do you see it?" Sure enough, there was...a rainbow. We went outside onto the balcony, standing in the drizzle, to see it better. As we watched, the colours became brighter and brighter...it was beautiful. Then, just as we thought it couldn't get any better, a second rainbow appeared over the first, gradually darkening in colour like the first one.

A sense of well-being flooded over me. Everything was going to be alright now. We had God's promise, and that was enough. You probably have a similar story somewhere in your memories.

To this day, I look for a rainbow whenever it's raining and the sun is shining. There is a strange 'sense of comfort' just to see it. There it is, a beautiful arch across the sky, seeming to have no beginning or ending.

I know for a fact, that if you try to find the end of a rainbow, no matter how far you travel, you will have to keep going - the end will never appear. The rainbow will forever be a sign of hope.

We see them everywhere and always in conjunction with a promise. That's what the rainbow is, a promise, a reminder of the covenant between God and man forever. If anyone needed a promise or two, it was Noah.

Can you imagine being told by God to build an ark, gather your family and two of every kind of living creature, get in, close the doors and wait. Then, it started to rain, and did so for 40 days and nights. That would be like rain starting today and not stopping until the end of March.

That's a long time to never see the sunshine, but that's what Noah endured. Yet, he obeyed God's command - he built the ark; he gathered his family and all the creatures; and he floated around aimlessly over the waters as they rose high above the earth. You have to wonder if he ever thought that he might die on this boat.

Yet our God is a God of promises. Like the children's hymn says, "How do I know? The Bible tells me so." Noah learned by living it. The rain did stop, the sun did reappear, and the water subsided, so that eventually, the doors of the ark could be opened, and Noah, his family, and all the creatures could step out onto solid ground.

If that were the end of the story, people would forever live in fear that God would do this again to rid the world of evil. Even today, one might be tempted to think that this would be an appropriate time for another flood. But that's not what will happen.

I am not a predictor of the future, but I am a reader of the word of God, and in it I find this promise: "A flood will never again destroy all life on the earth. I will give you something to prove that I made this promise to you. When I bring clouds over the earth, you will see the rainbow in the clouds. This rainbow is proof of the agreement that I made with all living things on earth."

How many more times does God have to say it? The rainbow in the sky that we see today, is a sign of God's promise that He will never destroy all life again. But there is more.

There is yet another reason why the rainbow is a sign of God's grace to us. Look at 1 Peter 3. Peter sums up, rather nicely, as he talks about Noah and his family being saved from certain death.

"You and I too have been saved from a sure death in **this** way: Christ died for our sins. He did it once, and He did it for all humankind." That's all of us here today.

Christ is the perfect one, the perfect sacrifice. Only an exchange of the righteous for the unrighteous would suffice. So, Jesus did what He had to do. He went to the cross in His perfection to pay for us, in our imperfection.

Peter explains it further, this way: "In the days of Noah, only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water; and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also, not the removal of dirt from the body, but this pledge of our conscience toward God."

So, that rainbow in the sky is more than a promise that God will never send a flood again, it is the reminder of our baptism, through water, our salvation in Jesus Christ, and our promise of eternal life.

Oh, and one more thing about a rainbow! Have you ever seen one on a bright sunny and picture-perfect day? No? You haven't, and you won't either, and do you know why? It's because a rainbow only appears in the sky at the end of a storm. It's after the thunder and the lightning are all over and the rain is beginning to subside and the sun comes out. That's when you see a rainbow. You have to weather the storm first.

It's not much different than our walk with Christ. We see the greatest riches of our God after we have weathered the storms of life. When things are going well and life is easy, the rainbows just don't appear.

BUT, when we go through difficult times, when our faith is tested and we keep our trust in God, that's when we really see the full effect of His grace, mercy and love. That's when we see and experience the riches of living a life founded in the Almighty. That's when we see our rainbow.

The only flood you and I will ever see, is the flood of God's grace and the riches of His kingdom, bestowed on us forever! You may never look at a rainbow in quite the same way again!

AMEN