

A Rainbow – The Sign of the Covenant

[Genesis 9:8-17](#), [1 Peter 3:18-22](#)

Picture the worst thunderstorm you have ever seen. You can literally see the dark clouds rolling in. You know the worst is about to hit. You bring in the plants, close all the windows, find the candles and flashlights, and you batten down the hatches and wait. During the height of the storm, it sounds like your house is going to come off its foundation. The lightning is so bright it temporarily blinds you. The thunder roars to the point where you are checking the windows for breaks. Then the storm rolls on, and all is strangely quiet.

That is about the time when you start hearing the birds singing again. You might head out on your porch or deck and watch the storm move on. And then you see it – a beautiful flash of color over the grey sky. The rainbow arches across the

sky that lets you know the storm has passed, for only when the sun reappears can you see the rainbow in the sky.

Our scripture lesson from Genesis is probably the ending of a fairly familiar story. God had given humankind free will to make decisions – the freedom of choice. God’s people were enticed by sin and destruction. God had continued to call God’s people into a personal relationship, and yet humankind continued to sin against God. While God showed infinite love and care for God’s people, at times the God of judgment must act. God had decided to destroy the earth by flood.

God found a faithful servant in Noah who took over 100 years to build an ark for his family and the animals of the earth. Without question, Noah trusted God and built the ark according to specific instructions. When the ark was finished and the time came, the rains began, the storms raged, the ark was lifted off

the earth, tossed to and fro in the storm for 40 days and nights.

But when the storm passed and the sun appeared again, God sent the sign of a new covenant and a promise of hope; a rainbow.

Rainbows are interesting feats of nature. They can only occur when the sun is low in the sky and when there is sufficient moisture in the air to split white light into its components – hence it can only appear after a storm. I’m a scientist from my earlier life, so I have had a chance to play with a prism. When you shoot white light through a prism, with proper adjustments you can usually get the light to split into the full spectrum of colors of a rainbow. The moisture left over from a storm that is hanging in the air serves as a prism to split the white light into its colors. So you need the remnants of a storm left in the air along with the sign of the passing of the storm to create this masterpiece.

Our lives may be marked by storms – times of difficulty and stress, times of sorrow and despair. It is interesting that this scripture comes during the first Sunday in Lent. Throughout the season of Lent we will be traveling down the path that led Jesus to the cross. There are times of joy and celebration in conjunction with times of great sorrow and trial. Jesus continued to serve God knowing that it would cost him great suffering and ultimately a painful and shame-filled death on the cross. Yet God maintained a thread of hope that this too shall pass. Jesus rose from the dead in the ultimate victory over suffering.

At times it can be nearly impossible to envision the rainbow in the middle of our storms. The storm of our faltering world-wide economy continues to rage on. The ripple effect is being seen in practically every industry and in every country.

People are out of work – everyone seems to be feeling the crunch as we have to tighten our belts, and batten down to weather the storm. Some of us are facing challenging family trials that are shaking our very faith. It is hard to find any support whatsoever for keeping families together in the secular world. So much is vying for our time that the once strong bonds of family are being stretched to the limits. Health issues or stresses continue to confront us on all sides – it seems we take care of one issue only to have two more issues surface. The storms rage on, but we are not alone.

We have also seen the rainbow appear in our lives. We have seen God make things happen that continue to amaze us. We have come a long way in the few months we've been together as a congregation. Already we are answering the call to serve our community. Already we are seeing the fruits of our

labor – we are finding new ways to connect with our community to extend God’s loving hand to a world in need. Yet we all had to weather some storms to get here. For me, God has taken care of some health issues I thought would keep me from pursuing the path toward ministry. In spite of my concerns, God was already at work in my life. I know several folks here have also had to weather some pretty intense storms, both as individuals and as a congregation. I can’t possibly understand the difficulties this congregation endured during the time without a pastor, yet we have all emerged stronger and more focused. Sometimes we have to weather the storm, but while we are bracing for the fierce winds and rain, God is watching over us. We don’t know why things happen the way they do. We don’t understand why some seem to skate through life fancy free while others seem to be hit with problems from all sides. But we cling to God’s hand, our hope for eternal life. The rainbow

is the sign of God's covenant – as a reminder that God is dedicated to God's people, and as a symbol of hope for those of us weathering the storms of life.

Yet there is another powerful symbol we can also cling to in times of trouble. Jesus paved the way for us to eternal life. Humans are naturally drawn to sin, yet Jesus paid the price for our sin by dying on a cross. The empty cross is our sign; Jesus died so that we could have the promise of eternal life. And so we have two powerful symbols of hope – a rainbow as a sign of the end of a storm and a promise of God, and the empty cross as our symbol of salvation and eternal life. We will weather the storm and we can cling to the nail-scarred hand of redemption for our sins. Thanks be to God. Amen.