

Genesis 9:8-17; 1 Peter 3:18-22

Grace to you and Peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

So we can't really talk about the story of the Flood as we got it tonight in chapter 9, which is the end of the story of the Flood, without actually first going back to the beginning of the story of the Flood. So that means we have to grab our Bibles, oh wait I forget – we're Lutherans we don't bring our Bibles with us. Okay, so I'll do it for us. In Genesis chapter 6, starting around verse 5:

“⁵ 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.” (Gen 6:5 NRS).

I am going to skip a couple of verses and get down to verse 7:

⁷ So the LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created – people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” ⁸ But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD. (Gen 6:7-8 NRS) ¹³ And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. ¹⁴ Make yourself an ark of cypress wood: make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. (Gen 6:13-14 NRS)

Now hopefully you probably remember the rest of the story here that Noah and Sons construction build this floating zoo. They gather all the appropriate fauna, and they stock enough flora to keep everybody fed for an indefinite period of time. Now as a bit of an aside – for those of us who know Bill Cosby's version of the Genesis story, there is no recorded conversation of Noah and the Lord God here. As a matter of fact, we don't get any conversation between Noah and anyone until well AFTER the Ark has landed. That happens at the second half of chapter 9, but you can go home and read that tonight.

So finally, our lesson tonight, chapter 9, we're going to skip over 7 and 8 there. Chapter 9, twelve months have passed. Twelve months of rain and then just floating around and trying to figure out what you're going to do. They finally, finally the Ark comes to rest on top of the mount that we know as Ararat, and there the waters eventually recede. Everybody gets off the boat and the first thing that Noah does, he builds an altar and offers a sacrifice from the critters that are on board. (Now as another aside so that you don't think that this is why we no longer have unicorns, if you would have jumped back to chapter 7 it is a really cool story. The middle of chapter 6, 7, 8 and half of chapter 9, it will read real quick. Go home, it's in Genesis the first book in your Bible. But if you jump back to chapter 7, God telling Noah ² “Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate; ³ and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth.” (Gen 7:2-3 NRS) So it wasn't just TWO of each, of all the acceptable animals, that is what they mean by clean, the ones that they could eat. They took seven pairs in all of the animals that they weren't allowed to eat and again you've got to jump

into Leviticus to figure all that out. I am not going to go into that now. But of all the ones you're not suppose to eat, only take one pair.)

So they started off with fourteen of all the acceptable animals. And so of course they have way more than just fourteen by the time they get all done because animals do what animals do and multiplied. So they land, Noah does the sacrifice (apparently all on his own, without any coaxing from the Lord God Almighty), and God responds to Noah with a covenant. It's not just ANY covenant. It's a special kind of covenant, unique for its day. But what is really, what is a "covenant?" (I did learn in confirmation class a while ago that "Covenant" is the name of an alien race in a video game that is bent on the extermination of humanity, but that's NOT the "covenant" that I am talking about.)

A covenant is a promise, or a contract, usually between two unequal parties. A covenant generally benefits the more powerful and stronger party, while also promising or attempting to take care of the weaker or lessor party. Along the lines of 'I will be your king and I will provide protection for your city, so long as you give to me, annually forty percent of your crops, and you'll provide five hundred men for my armies, and once a month you'll provide enough livestock to feed the palace for a week. And as long as you do that I will keep your city safe.' That's usually how a covenant ran.

The covenant, though, that we heard tonight, there in chapter 9, while it was indeed between two unequal parties, did you notice how the deal was really made? Verse 11, God said 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." The covenant is made between the Lord God AND the earth, everything that is on the earth. But it's not that 'I will never again destroy the earth by a flood so long as you continue to worship me.' It's not 'I won't wipe away everything on the earth so long as everybody makes the right sacrifices.' God says, 'I am making a promise, I am never going to do this again. Period. No matter what you do, no matter how you act, no matter if you follow me or you turn your backs on me, never again, I promise, never again will I destroy the earth with a flood.'

Not only that, God says it is not just between you Noah and the people right now. It's not just between you and your immediate descendants, it's between you and everyone throughout time. ¹² **I make my covenant between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:** It's for Noah right then and there. It's for the world until the end of time. Now just how exactly is God going to do this? 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."

This is great imagery, isn't it? We all see the rainbow as often as we can. Now the cool thing to me in THIS story, in my reading of the story this time, is that I had one of those proverbial "Light bulb" moments when I suddenly got the vision of the bow in the sky. Not the RAIN-bow though, but a bow, as in bow and arrow. Because, that's another translation of the word there in the Hebrew. When it talks about bow, it can mean the thing in the sky, it can also mean the

weapon. A weapon that you can use to kill your enemy, to kill your dinner, to get those who are attacking you. Yet, here it is, being used by the Lord God Almighty as an image of peace. As an image of promise. It's a bow, but it's an unstrung bow. But more importantly, the bow faces, what? Not toward the earth, but when it's arched, it's pointing away from the earth. Which way would the arrow go? **Away** from the earth. It won't go toward that which was just washed clean, it won't go toward that with which the covenant was just made. It is pointed upward, toward the One who Made the covenant. It's pointed to the one who has become, we could even say . . . penitential about what has just transpired.

And that's what this time of Lent is about. It's about a time of Penitence. It's about a time of Repentance. It's about a time of Reflection. Lent is a time to think about my walk with the Lord and to remember what the Lord has done for me and what the Lord has done to me, and what the Lord will do with me. We are reminded in our lesson of the Flood that, even in the nastiest of times when life is thrown into utter chaos as when the waters of the Flood approach, that the Lord God is there with us. Noah and his entire family were NOT abandoned by the Lord God, neither are we. There will be storms in our lives as God is there to remind us that we do not walk alone and, to remind us that even God will take time for meditation and reflection. God will take the time to listen and be renewed.

Lent calls to us, wherever we are. Lent calls to us to return to that right relationship that we are to be in with God. Lent calls to us that we might remember all that God has done for us, is doing for us, and will do with us. Lent is a reminder that there is indeed a bow, not only in the sky, but in our hearts. A bow that points the way toward God. A bow that points the way through all of the *Stuff* that gets in and messes up our lives. God said to Noah, 'this is the promise, this is the covenant, this is the contract that I make with you and every living creature throughout time: and I will remember my covenant. Forever.'

Amen