

“Don’t Forget to Remember”

Genesis 9:8-17, Proper 12-B, July 26, 2015

Brothers and sisters when I took a close look at our Old Testament lesson this morning (Genesis 9:8-17), I was reminded of a ***Peanuts*** cartoon that appeared in a newspaper many years ago. Linus and Lucy are standing at the front window of their living room in their home, looking intently out the window at the rain as it is falling to the earth. Lucy says, **“Wow! It’s really pouring outside! What if it doesn’t stop and the whole world is flooded by rain?”**

Linus answers, **“Lucy there is no need for you to worry about that. God promised Noah in Genesis 9 that there would never again be a flood of such magnanimous proportions that it would flood the whole earth! God even puts his rainbows in the sky, following a rain to remind us of that!”**

Lucy, usually never very complimentary towards Linus, surprises him: **“Linus I want to thank you for that, because you’ve taken a great load off my mind!”** to which Linus replies, **“Lucy, sound theology has a great way of doing that!”**

Sound theology does do much to alleviate our needless fears in this life, doesn’t it, dear friends!?!

And of course, you may know, that there are other stories of worldwide floods in other ancient civilizations. The Sumerians of southern Mesopotamia had a story about a worldwide flood! So did the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and even the ancestors of those ancient people who once lived in what we know today as the country of India!

But only the Biblical account tells us that there is only one true God, who is himself the very Creator of all that exists, and that he is not a capricious God; a God who does things on the spur of the moment with no rhyme or reason, but he is a God who always acts very judiciously in his interaction with human beings! The God of the Bible always does what is right, and never does anything that is wrong. And one of his chief characteristics is that he is a **Holy and Righteous God who demands justice and who vows to punish those who do evil in our world.** Yes, our God is a God of grace, forgiveness and mercy, but he could never be a God of grace, forgiveness and mercy unless he was a God of justice, demanding righteousness, first!

So once again, in **Lafayette, Louisiana** this past Thursday evening, July 23, a 58 year old man opened fire in a local movie theatre, leaving 3 people dead and 9 people wounded, before he then turned the gun on himself ending his own life. And just one week before this, July 16, a gunman in Chattanooga, Tennessee **unleashed a barrage of fire at a recruiting center and at another U.S. Military Site a few miles away; killing four Marines,** before the gunman was shot to death by police. And all of this comes on the **heels of those 9 people murdered at the Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston on June 17.** In such matters as these, these **surviving family members and society as a whole demand justice;** they want the wrongdoings against their loved ones to be avenged, and rightfully so!

BUT UNFORTUNATELY TODAY IN THE CHURCH, AND OUTSIDE OF THE CHURCH, THERE ARE THOSE WOULD ROB THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY OF HIS OWN DEEP NEED FOR JUSTICE IN OUR FALLEN WORLD.

Not long ago, the comedian/talk show host, Bill Maher who always has a great tendency to ridicule the Bible and teachings of the Christian faith, said that if the story of Noah and the Ark is true, then this means that **God is the biggest mass murderer in the history of all world civilizations.**

When I hear things like this, I begin to look forward the Great and Last Day of the Lord to end all days that St. Paul tells us about in **2 Cor. 5:10** when he says: *“We all must stand one day before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the due penalty for things done in the body by us, while we were here, both good and bad!”*

But I am also grateful for St. Paul who says in **Romans 8:1-4**, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! For God, has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do; by sending his own Son into the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit!”*

Most of us have been familiar with the story of Noah and the Ark since we were children in Sunday school and yet, isn't it a possibility that we have often had a tendency to over **romanticize** the story; seeing its chiefly as a desire on the part of God to protect the animals from **danger**, while never stopping to think really what a traumatic event this also had to be for Noah, his sons, and their families!

You know what trauma is! **Trauma is an unwelcomed emotional response** that people may experience from time to time following any terrible, unwelcomed event that has come upon them in this life; be it an automobile accident, a mugging, or surviving any kind of natural disaster like a hurricane, a tornado, or a wildfire! People who suffer from traumatic events like these, often later experience flashbacks that are terrifying, headaches and nausea!

But have we ever stopped to think what a **traumatic event this must have been for Noah and his family? Can you imagine the terror that Noah and his family members must have experienced every time the storm clouds began rolling in and gathering on the horizon? What was it like for them when those first few raindrops began to fall?** Do you think that they became imperiled every time they saw a streak of lightning bolt across the sky or heard that first peel of thunder rolling through the skies?

Brothers and sisters, this must obviously have been their reaction, when we see just how far our gracious God goes to alleviate their fears and to ease their anxiety in the aftermath of that worldwide flood, as presented to us in our Old Testament lesson today (Genesis 9:8-17).

Seven times, God is speaking some powerful words of **blessed assurance** and **blessed reassurance** to Noah and to all of us really, making a great covenant not only with Noah and the people of Israel who would one day spring forth on this earth, but to all human beings, and even to all forms of animal life as we know it upon this earth!

The covenant that God made with Noah is a covenant that he has made not only with Noah, his sons and their wives, but with the whole human race, but with every other living creature! Listen to what God told Noah again in verse 8-11: *“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth! I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Vv. 8-11)! **God says,** “When I see the bow, 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” (Genesis 9:15)*

So let me ask you, do you ever have **trouble remembering things**, things that are important to you in your life? And if you do, what methods have you devised or learned to help you remember the things that you really need to remember in life?

When I was a child I remember my **grandmother** teaching me that one of the best ways to remember something, when I needed to remember it, was to **tie a string around my finger** that day, when it first came to mind for me. As a matter of fact, my grandmother even kept some pieces of brightly-colored yarn, pre-cut, in a drawer in her kitchen for that very purpose!

But most people today, I think can come up with more sophisticated ways of remembering important events and commitments in their lives than that. Some people will **write a note and place it under a magnet on their refrigerator**. Others will write it down in their **“Day Timer”** planning book reserved just for that very purpose!

I’ve learned in the **past few years to send myself an email**. I even send myself an email, putting in the subject line: **Telephone your mother!**

Why just think of all the things you are called upon to remember in this life! Take out the garbage on Wednesday morning and the “recyclables” every other Wednesday. Walk the dog, feed the cat, water the lawn, do your grocery shopping, wash clothes, pick up the dry cleaning and change the oil in your car!

But I have always found it extremely intriguing here that our God who reveals to us in many places throughout the Bible that he is **omniscient, that is he all-knowing, that nothing ever escapes his memory, and that nothing ever comes to him by a surprise or catches him off guard, leads us to believe that he is putting that rainbow in the sky as much for his own benefit as he is doing so for ours!**

Really? Does God need a reminder to do the right thing, the way that you and I so often need a reminder? That’s why you set the timer on your stove for 45 minute when you’re baking a cake, don’t you, for fear that you’ll forget all about it and the cake might burn?

God’s telling Noah and his family that he will look at that rainbow and remember his promise to the human race is a classic case of what theologians have called now for many years an “anthropomorphism,” which I know is a long word and probably one of those words that my preaching professor told me years ago at the seminary never to use in a sermon, but I am hoping I might be justified in doing so today, anyway!

Anthropomorphism comes from two **Greek words**; **“anthropos,”** which is the word for “man” or “human being” and the word **“morphé”** which means “form.” In theological terms, **anthropomorphism is ascribing human characteristics to God, long before the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; because God, the Bible tells us, in the Old Testament, is a Spirit.** But there are countless times already in the Old Testament, when the Biblical writers ascribe human characteristics to the LORD God Almighty to help us better understand him and his dealings with the people of this earth.

In several places in the Bible, already in the Old Testament, **God is described as having the physical attributes of a man.** In **Leviticus 20:6**, we read: **“He sets his face against evil!”** In **Numbers**

6:25, we read: *“The Lord will make his face to shine on you!”* In **Psalm 89:10**, *“He scattered his enemies with his strong arm!”* In **Deuteronomy 11:12**, *“He keeps his eye on the land!”*

Anthropomorphisms can be helpful in enabling us to at least partially comprehend the incomprehensible, know the unknowable, and fathom the unfathomable. But God is God and we are not, and all of our human expressions are intrinsically inadequate in explaining fully and properly the divine. Didn't the good Lord make this abundantly clear to us one day when he says through Isaiah, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways, your ways declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:8-98)!

And yet, my brothers and sisters, everything that follows this Old Testament lesson today throughout the whole Old Testament is the record of how God's covenant here has been tested and battered repeatedly by sinful human beings!

In the face of the continual rebellion by all generations of Israel, from Abraham through Moses and David and the prophets of the nations, God may have been tempted to resort once more to condemnation. The election of a chosen people makes no difference. The liberation from Egypt makes no difference. The giving of the Law through Moses at Mount Sinai makes no difference. The calling of the prophets make no difference. Still, always, the people continue to wander, refuse, and reject God. And all along the way, starting over, starting afresh, wiping out the troublesome seems to be the most efficient solution.

But God's promise endures. It endures until, finally, at great cost to God, a radically different possibility is revealed. In Jesus, God the rightful judge is himself judged and condemned to death. What is wrong is allowed to be maximally and emphatically wrong. Yet this ultimate violence is met then, by Jesus' resurrection and our Lord's own reiteration of the promise to Noah, now in infinite form.

Never again! Grace overwhelms every offense. The peace that Jesus offered was not born of righteousness but indefatigable love, shown in forgiveness and it is in forgiveness that the glory of God can be seen.

Friends, no one wants to face the possibility of some traumatic event taking place in their life one day, but there is one very important, great and traumatic event in the future where we can be certain about the outcome. This is the event of God's final judgment of which St. Paul speaks in **2 Corinthians 5:10, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil!”***

God's Word teaches us that there are many people who do not fear God's impending judgment who ought to be greatly troubled by it, but there are also others who fear God's judgment, who need the kind of assurance and reassurance from God that only God can give to them—that their sins are forgiven and that they will not be condemned when they stand before him. It is to these people that our text gives its beautiful words of blessed assurance.

And as great of a sign as the rainbow is, God has given us and even much greater sign in the sign of his cross! “Lift High the Cross, the Love of Christ Proclaim, till all the world adore his Holy Name!” God has given us a much greater sign in our Baptism. In Romans 6, Paul writes, ***“We were buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that just as Jesus was raised from the dead to the glory of his Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Vv. 1-3)!***

God has given us a great sign in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Jesus says, **“Take this bread and eat it, it is my body. Take this wine and drink it, it is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”**

And isn't this why God also gave us his **Third Commandment:** ***“Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy!”*** Luther asks: “What does this mean?” And then he says, **“We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it!”**

God says it is important that we are faithful in our worship attendance. In the Means of Grace, he works to strengthen our faith. Already in the early church, some must have been more faithful than others. In Hebrews 10:23 we read: *“Let us hold fast to the confession of faith without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, s is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near!”*

Don't forget to remember the grace of God that is always ours in Christ Jesus his Son, ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son so that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him!” (John 3:16-17)*** Amen