



A Promise is a Promise: God Keeps Promises
First in the Lenten sermon series on Covenants
Genesis 9: 8-17

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First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
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At the end of this past Thursday's Lutheran Hillside Village bible study on today's Old Testament, one of the members of the class asked if he could share a story. It went something like this.

When Noah lowered the gangplank of the ark he told all of the animals to "Go forth and multiply!" They left the ark two by two. As Noah was cleaning up he saw two snakes coiled in the corner. "Didn't you hear me?" Noah asked. "I said, 'Go forth and multiply!'" One of the snakes began to cry. "We can't go forth and multiply; we adders!"

The story of Noah, the Ark and the Rainbow are familiar but the theology behind the story, the symbolish, is less familiar. Today we begin a sermon series on "Covenants" in the bible. "Covenant" is a word that isn't used much. The first time that I heard the word "covenant" was when my folks bought some land on which to build their house. The president of the homeowners' association came by asking them to sign a "covenant", an agreement about who they would, or importantly, would not sell their land and house to. Covenants are like a "contract.". As you may know, (I know that all of the attorneys in our midst know this) there are four parts to a contract: the offer, the acceptance, the intent, and consideration, or something of value, usually money.

The covenant of the Rainbow is not a two party contract, but a forever promise that God made to all Creation, including humanity, you and me, all our ancestors and all our heirs. So, what's the "backstory"? The world that God created out of Chaos and called good, was disintegrating back to Chaos. First there was the so-called "Fall". Then there was the fratricide of Able. And on it went; the "celestial" sons of God took the daughters of earth as their wives thus compromising the proper relationship between heaven and earth. Violence and corruption increased exponentially. There seemed to be no end in sight, and it grieved God deeply. So God decided to "destroy the destroyers", to wipe the slate clean with a "watery chaos" in which all flesh would die. But then God had second thoughts about this. God decided to save a "remanent." God is like that, you know. God always leaves a remnant, a chance for a "new beginning". In this new beginning God recognized that some things never change. What one person called "the law of the tooth and the claw" was not repealed. The strong will always be tempted to overpower the weak. When the flood waters finally

receded and this “new generation” stepped forward, God realized that retribution never changes anything, especially the human heart. Nor does punishment coerce us into ultimately changing our ways. There is only one thing that is powerful enough to do that; and that is Love.

In the closing scenes of the movie “Wonder Woman” Diana Prince says reflectively, I used to want to save the world. To end war and bring peace to mankind. But then, I glimpsed the darkness that lives within their light. I learned that inside every one of them, there will always be both. The choice each must make for themselves - something no hero will ever defeat. I've touched the darkness that lives in between the light. Seen the worst of this world, and the best. Seen the terrible things men do to each other in the name of hatred, and the lengths they'll go to for love. Now I know. Only love can save this world. In the story of Noah and the Rainbow we see God turn from vindication to forgiveness, frustration to patience. As one commentator said, “The creatures made in the image of God may always resist God, but God decided to “lay down” the Divine arsenal.”

This first covenant, the Rainbow Covenant, was recorded at a time when the people of Israel were in exile from their land. The community was in chaos. We know what chaos is in our own time and place. We know it in our personal lives; relationships broken by death, personal illness, estrangement from those whom we love or a feeling of estrangement from our community. The loss of a job or a home, or a way of life. We know it in our communities; the death of seventeen people in a Florida high school, the death of fifty-eight people at a concert in Las Vegas, terrorism at home and overseas, wars that seem to know no end, natural disasters. The list seems endless. It is endless.

We remember the story of Noah and the rainbow and tell it to our children and grandchildren because within that story there is a light of hope that shines brightly even in life's darkest hours. God is faithful, even when we are not.

God is with us, even when we feel alone.

God will never forget us, God will always be with us to the end of time and beyond.

Amen.