

## Genesis 9:1-17

<sup>1</sup>God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. <sup>3</sup>Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. <sup>4</sup>Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. <sup>5</sup>For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life. <sup>6</sup>Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind. <sup>7</sup>And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it." <sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. <sup>11</sup>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."

<sup>12</sup>God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." <sup>17</sup>God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

You may recall that two summers ago I was traveling quite a bit. I was given the responsibility to be head of the Executive Presbyter Search Committee for our presbytery. Our former Executive Presbyter, David Dobler, had become the president of Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka. It was time to regroup, to rethink, and to seek God's guidance for the future of our presbytery. As the Search Committee was being formed and as we began to understand the task in front of us, it became clear that a very important part of that task was to conduct a mission study for our presbytery. Presbytery Council gave that responsibility to our Search Committee. So, two summers ago, I was gone from our congregation here for six Sundays as I traveled around our

presbytery speaking with congregations about their hopes and dreams and visions and faith. Most of you know that Leisa and I share one pastoral position here in this congregation. Leisa encouraged me to do my best with the presbytery's mission study – she covered both halves of the pastorate here. I apologize again to those in the congregation who were irritated with me for taking those six weeks to travel around the presbytery, but there is no question in my mind that that was what I was called to be doing that summer. It was an incredible experience. But it did take a bit out of me. That was two summers ago. Last summer I had the goal of sleeping in my own home every night for the whole summer, and I did it. I also thought that I would try to make life easier for myself with the preaching as well. I thought back to fourteen years earlier when I spent three summers preaching through the Book of Genesis. Maybe I could go back to those fourteen-year-old sermons and rewrite them. It was supposed to be easier. But I found myself becoming almost obsessed in studying everything I could get my hands on for those first eight chapters of Genesis. I looked at those fourteen year old sermons and decided to just put them away. Rather than an easier summer, it became much more complex, but I enjoyed the task. The last one, however, was the hardest for me to preach. I had prepared it just when we found that Leisa had breast cancer. The topic of Noah and the ark and the great flood were the furthest things from my mind, but as I didn't have anything else prepared, I preached it anyway. Talk about a disconnect! Much has happened in our lives since last September. Hard to imagine it has only been seven months.

Now here it is, the first day of June. Do I dare look at Genesis again? Am I even interested? Will it speak to me as it did last summer? Will I have the passion to study it

like I had last summer? Who knows? June first. Genesis, chapter 9. Noah is off the boat. Time to get on with life. Time to get on with life. His whole world had been radically altered. Nothing would be the same again. Time to start over. The slate had been cleaned. Time to start again. Maybe that is my story as well.

My brother's mother-in-law is a novelist. Her particular specialty is the historical novel set in a biblical context. Those who have read her books seem to enjoy them, but I find I have great difficulty enjoying an historical novel. I do enjoy reading novels and over the past decade I have found a great fondness for reading history. But an historical novel has been problematic for me. I have the kind of mind that wants to know which part of the novel is based on history and what part is based on fancy. I have often wondered if there can be such a thing as a "red letter edition" of historical novels which have the historical people and events being set in black and the fiction part of the novel being set in red. But, oh well. My book purchases obviously do not drive the market. But, back to my brother's mother-in-law. Should she decide to take on Noah as the subject of her next historical biblical novel, the setting for the story would seem to be as wide open as one could ever hope for. Man and his family put into a boat – a huge floating box, really – and with them a number of animals – a deluge comes and washes everything away – the deluge recedes – the big floating box is opened and they all get out – it is a new world – the slate has been cleaned – time to start again. The stage has been set for a new beginning.

Last September when we pondered the many dimensions of the story of Noah and the Ark, my mind was so discombobulated that I don't think I even was able to hear the sermon that I preached. Maybe some of you did. Perhaps in the near future, at

least for my sake, we ought to revisit some of those images. But not today. Today we reflect on the new beginnings after that huge wooden womb had given birth to the new. The new creation. Creation: take two. Similar to Creation: take one – the one at the beginning of the Book of Genesis with Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. Similar, but different. Instructions and a blessing. There is a lot in this chapter to reflect on and to compare with the Eden of Genesis, Chapter 2, but that, too, will be left for another day. Today perhaps we can reflect on just a couple thoughts.

One is the instruction about the eating of animals. Recall back to God's instructions to the Man and the Woman in the Garden of Eden. The plants were given as food. The animals were given as helpers to the Man and to the Woman. Vegetarians are very aware of those images from the first two chapters of Genesis. But it had been some time since the Garden of Eden was left behind and humanity was no longer vegetarian. God gave updated instructions about food from animals. When they ate an animal, they had to take care not to eat the animal's blood. The blood of the animal was considered the life of the animal. Throughout the Fertile Crescent, blood was drunk as a way of transferring the life of the animal to the person drinking it. Very powerful symbolism. But the God of the Bible gave unique instructions to Noah. No drinking of the blood because life belonged to God and to drink the blood was like someone trying to capture for ones-self that which belonged only to God. In a way it is a bridge back to the Garden of Eden and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Some things belong within the realm of God and it would be best for humanity to leave for God that which belongs to God.

The other image is the rainbow. Following the Great Deluge, God made a promise – a Covenant – that God would not ever destroy all of creation with a flood again. Regardless of the possibilities for evil, God made a covenant to be with and to work with and to journey with humanity. Certainly there were rainbows before the days of Noah, but God turned rainbows into symbols of blessing and promise. At a time when the rainbow was associated literally with bows while lightening bolts were associated with arrows, the rainbow was a symbol that God was putting the bow – the weapon – down. But even more incredible is that while the symbol of the bow is very much a sign for us of the Covenant between God and humanity, when God made the rainbow as a sign of the Covenant, that was to be a sign for *God* to see and for *God* to remember. Rainbows usually come in the midst of great clouds – storm clouds? Every once in a while in our valley here we have those big clouds with downpours. Then we see a striking rainbow. In our home, when one of us sees a rainbow, we will call all the others to gather at the window or outside to the porch to look at it together. Inspiring – always inspiring. But to think that that very same rainbow we are enjoying out of our back window is also being observed by God. “Yes. I remember. I remember my promise to humanity.”

Many, many, many centuries after Noah died, Jesus the Christ also died. Executed. And there was blood. An execution on a cross using nails in his wrists and feet, his back whipped, with a crown of thorns jammed onto his head, there had to be blood. When the guard wanted to check to see if Jesus really was dead, he cut Jesus in his side. Blood along with water came out. Blood was life – when water came out with the blood, it was clear to the guard that life had left Jesus. He was dead. God's

words to Noah many centuries before were about not eating any flesh with its blood because the blood was the life in the animal and all life belonged to God. The night before Jesus was crucified he shared a meal with his disciples. He gave them Holy Communion. When they gathered and ate together, the bread would represent Jesus' body. The wine would represent Jesus' blood. In Old Testament times, it was commanded that humanity should not drink the blood of animals because the blood was the life of the animal, and all life belonged to God. To have drunk the blood of a human being would have been unthinkable even as it is unthinkable for us today. That's the stuff of scary and evil vampire movies. But then Jesus asked his disciples to do what would have been unthinkable. "Consider the wine. The wine is my blood. When you drink it, you drink it in memory of me." No wonder the early Christians were kicked out of the synagogues and were persecuted by so many. Downright creepy if one does not understand. But when one does understand, it is the most powerful of images. To drink the wine in communion is all about receiving life. Life. Life from Christ. Life from God.

When the Great Deluge had receded and the ark had settled onto dry land, the grand door was unsealed. All that were within entered into the world around them. A new world. A new beginning. It was time to start again. For us, too, it is never ever ever too late to start again. Maybe the world does not forgive. Maybe the world does not forget. But today we are gathered in the presence of the Almighty God who has made promises and who has made the rainbow a reminder of those promises – not just a reminder for us, but a reminder even for God. Remember the promise. Remember the promise. God is about new beginnings. God is about life. The powerful gift of Holy

Communion. God is about life. It is time to receive the life of Christ. Time to start again. Amen.