

McCabe United Methodist Church

February 21, 2010

Pastor Art Scanson

“The Rainbow – A Promise”

Genesis 9:8-16

One of the best known stories in all literature is the story of Noah and the Ark. Now you may be wondering where is he going with this while we are still in the middle of winter. Well, this scripture story is a part of Lenten Lectionary. Because of the destruction of humanity at the time of the flood. A reminder of our sinfulness and it's consequences.

Let me share with you a modern version of Noah. The Lord spoke to Noah and said, “Noah, in six months I'm going to make it rain until the whole world is covered with water. But I want to save a few good people and two of every living thing on the planet. So I am ordering you to build an Ark.”

“Ok,” Noah said, trembling with fear. “I'm your man.” Six months passed, the sky began to cloud up, and the rain begins to fall in torrents. The Lord looked down and saw Noah sitting in his yard. There was no Ark.

“Noah!” shouted the Lord, “where is My Ark?”

“Lord, please forgive me!” begged Noah. “I did my best, but there were some big problems. First, I had to get a building permit. My neighbors objected, claiming that I was violating zoning ordinances by building an Ark in my front yard. I spent months trying to get a variance from the city planning board. After all that, I had a big problem getting enough wood for the Ark, because of the endangered species act.

“Then the carpenters' union started picketing my home because I wasn't using union carpenters. Next, I started gathering up the animals—but got sued by an animal rights group. Just when that suit got dismissed, the EPA notified me that I couldn't complete the Ark without filing an environmental impact statement for your proposed flood. Then the Corps of Engineers wanted a map of the area to be flooded. I sent them a globe—and they when ballistic! Lord, I'm sorry, but I don't think there's any way I can finish the Ark in less than five years—if ever!”

With that, the sky cleared, the sun began to shine, and a rainbow arched across the sky. Noah looked up and smiled. “You mean you are not going to destroy the world?” he asked hopefully.

“Wrong!” thundered the Lord. “But I'm going to do it with something far worse than a mere flood. Something far more destructive. Something that man himself created.”

“What's that?” Noah asked.

“Government!” said the Lord. (Saul Rapkin, The Jewish Humor List (jhumor@lgk.com))

Even the children know the story of Noah and the ark and the animals. Especially the ending of how God made a promise to Noah, and to all humankind. That never again would God send a flood to destroy the earth.

There are a few things about rainbows that are interesting. Rainbows appear at the end of rainstorms because it is then that you have the two things necessary to make them: 1) water droplets suspended in the sky and 2) sunlight, which comes from behind you. . . A rainbow's visible colors are always arrayed in the same order: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. . . Rainbows are actually circular. They appear to be arches (or half circles) only because

their bottom halves are cut off by the ground you stand upon. Oh, it might be possible to see the whole rainbow if you were riding in an airplane.

These are some technical truths about rainbows, but they do not explain the emotional lift we get from these wonders of nature. That God will forever keep the promise. No more flood that will destroy everything.

Rainbows come after the storms. Perhaps this is another reason we love rainbows. No matter how fierce the storm might be, if we see a rainbow afterward, it gives us hope.

Nancy Leigh DeMoss tells a truly touching story. It's about a woman named Sandra.

Sandra was feeling exceedingly low as she made her way into the florist shop. It was Thanksgiving week. This is the week she would have delivered her second child, a son. But there was an automobile accident. As a result, she lost her baby. As if to add to her grief, her husband's company was threatening a transfer and her sister called to say she could not come for the holiday.

"Thanksgiving? Thankful for what?" she wondered aloud. "For an airbag that saved her life but took that of her child?"

"Good afternoon, can I help you?" The shop clerk's approach startled her.

"I . . . I need an arrangement," stammered Sandra. "For Thanksgiving."

"Are you looking for something that conveys 'gratitude' this Thanksgiving?" asked the shop clerk.

"Not exactly!" Sandra blurted out. "In the last five months, everything that could go wrong has gone wrong." Sandra regretted her outburst, and was surprised when the shop clerk said, "I have the perfect arrangement for you."

Just then another customer entered the shop. The clerk said, "Hi Barbara. . . let me get your order." She walked toward a small workroom, then quickly reappeared, carrying an arrangement of long stemmed thorny roses. Except the ends of the rose stems had been snipped. . . there were no roses, just stems with lots and lots of thorns.

"Want this in a box?" asked the clerk.

Was this a joke? thought Sandra. Who would want rose stems without flowers? But it was no joke. After the customer left with her order Sandra stammered, "Uhh, that lady just left with, uhh. . . she just left with no flowers!"

"Right," said the clerk. "I cut off the flowers. That's the Special. . . I call it the Thanksgiving Thorns Bouquet." Then the clerk explained, "Barbara came into the shop three years ago feeling very much like you feel today. She thought she had very little to be thankful for. She had lost her father to cancer, the family business was failing, her son was into drugs, and she was facing major surgery."

"That same year I had lost my husband," continued the clerk, "and for the first time in my life, I had to spend the holidays alone. I had no children, no husband, no family nearby, and too great a debt to allow any travel."

"So what did you do?" asked Sandra.

"I learned to be thankful for thorns." answered the clerk quietly. "I've always thanked God for good things in life and never thought to ask God why those good things happened to me, but when bad stuff hit, did I ever ask! It took time for me to learn that dark times are important. I always enjoyed the 'flowers' of life, but it took thorns to show me the beauty of God's comfort. You know, the Bible says that God comforts us when we're afflicted, and from

God's consolation we learn to comfort others."

Sandra said, "I guess the truth is I don't want comfort. I've lost a baby and I'm angry with God."

Just then another customer entered and the clerk went to help them. As Sandra thought of what she had just heard, she noticed tears beginning to run down her cheeks. For the first time since the accident, she loosened her grip on resentment. As the clerk returned, Sandra managed to choke out the words, "I'll take those twelve long stemmed thorns, please."

"I hoped you would," said the clerk gently. "I'll have them ready in a minute."

"Thank you. What do I owe you?" asked Sandra. "Nothing." said the clerk. "Nothing but a promise to allow God to heal your heart. The first year's arrangement is always on me." As the clerk smiled and handed a card to Sandra.

"I'll attach this card to your arrangement, but maybe you'd like to read it first." It read: *"Dear God, I have never thanked you for my thorns. I have thanked you a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my thorns. Teach me the glory of the cross I bear; teach me the value of my thorns. Show me that I have climbed closer to you along the path of pain. Show me that, through my tears, the colors of your rainbow look much more brilliant."* (www.ReviveOurHearts.com)

Sandra had been through the storm. Now she could see the rainbow. Perhaps that is one reason our spirits are lifted by rainbows? They follow the storms.

In the same way, perhaps it was God's presence with Jesus during those days of struggle leading up to the cross, that Jesus was able to continue. Because he knew there was that promise that God would always be with him.

Lent comes to remind us of that promise and allows us to celebrate the resurrection each Sunday during our Lenten journey. Thanks Be To God!