

Colors of Promise©

Genesis 9:8-17

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Rev. Sharlyn Gates

Do you remember Bill Cosby's recording back in the 60's about Noah and the Ark? The particular story I liked was called "Noah: Right!"

Here is a little portion of it:

Noah is working in his garden, when he hears God's voice speaking.

Narrator: Noah is working in his garden, when he hears God's voice speaking.

God: "NOAH."

Noah: "Who is that?"

God: "It's the Lord, Noah,"

Noah: "Right. Where are you? What do you want? I've been good."

God: "I want you to build an ark."

Noah: "Right! (Pause) What's an ark?"

God: "Get some wood and build it 300 cubits by 80 cubits by 40 cubits."

Noah: "Right (Pause) What's a cubit?"

God: *(sigh)* "Well never mind. Don't worry about that right now. After you build the ark, I want you to go out into the world and collect all the animals of the world, two by two, male and female, and put them into the ark."

Noah: (Long Pause) "Right. Who is this really? What's going on? How come you want me to do all these weird things?"

God: "I'm going to destroy the world."

Noah: "Right Am I on Candid Camera?"

Narrator: Well Noah finally got the ark built. Then he had the task of gathering all the animals two by two. After he got them all on board he said,

Noah: "Whew, finally the last two animals are on board. Let's get this thing closed up before God asks me to do something else. I'm six hundred years old. I am getting too old for this sort of thing."

God: "Noah!"

Noah: "I knew it! What do you want now?"

God: "You're going to have to take one of those hippos off and get another one,"

Noah: "Why?"

God: "Cause you got two males. You need a female."

Noah: "I'm too tired to bring anything else on board. You *change* one of them."

God: "Come on, you know I don't work like that."

Noah: "But I'm sick and tired of this. I've been working all day everyday like crazy for months now, dawn to dusk."

(Pause)

God: "Noah"

Noah: "Yeah?"

God: "How long can you tread water?"

How long can you tread water? That is a humorous account of how God spoke to Noah about building the ark. According to Genesis, God created humans from the clay of the earth, and the animals, the day and night, the rain and sun, the moon and the stars. And God said they were all good!

By the time Noah's generation came along, according to Genesis, God had decided that was not true, anymore. People were perverse, they were wicked. The reason for their creation was not being lived out. God wanted relationship and instead, he got heartache.

Can you imagine the heart of God? This is a heart that loves deeply ... that envisioned the world and then made it. This is a heart that gave his human creation everything they needed and desired, including the most precious thing of all ... God's love ... an intimate relationship with the Creator.

By the time Noah was 600 years old, according to Genesis, the world had become so evil that God could not take it anymore. This was completely the opposite of what God had created, of God's intention.

Walter Brueggemann, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary writes this: "The flood narrative faces a basic incongruity of human life. On the one hand, God has called the world into being to be his faithful covenant partner.

He has willed unity, harmony, and goodness." ... but on the other hand," Dr. Brueggemann says, "it has not happened that way. God ordered a creation ordered by Sabbath rest. But this creation is resistant to the very one by whom and for whom it exists."

We hear the disappointment and the broken heart of God in the third chapter of Jeremiah, verse 19, where he says to the Israelites, "I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me."

But of course, the Israelites in Jeremiah, just as the earlier people in Genesis did ... all preferred evil to this wonderful relationship of peace and obedience with God.

"It is the same with creation," Brueggemann says. "The creation has refused to be God's creation. The world has betrayed God's good intent. Both the world and God have been denied their real character. In various ways, creation has exchanged the truth about God for a lie, worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator."

What we see here is a God who holds a firm expectation for his world and He will not abandon this expectation. God is not an angry tyrant in this story, but more the troubled parent who grieves over the alienation. He is not enraged but is saddened.

Humanity turned from God and in that separation, life was lost. God honored his intentions of upholding his original purpose ... for creation to be in shalom ... in peace and harmony with the creator.

And the story says that only Noah and his family and two of each animal were saved from the flood that destroyed the world. And a new creation was formed and God started a new beginning.

Well, thank goodness we've all lived in perfect obedience ever since! We learned our lessons well. Wouldn't you agree?

Can't you just hear God say ... "Right!"

We know better as we watch the news – especially today as we are remembering what happened 10 years on this day with the terrorist attacks in this country. We know that evil still exists and it affects people in every country on earth.

We would have to agree that humans did not learn their lesson, have not turned their hearts and lives to God, as we read on, we find the deepest meaning of this story of the flood.

The Scripture tells that God was saddened by the flood and we read the beautiful words of the first covenant written in the Bible ...

This Covenant was made with Noah and all generations after him. "And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creation that is with you, for all successive generations;'" (Genesis 9:12).

God's Covenant is a universal promise. While some covenants involve a small number, this particular promise includes "all living creatures." Humans and animals are covered in God's Covenant. It is unconditional. There are no stipulations. God doesn't say, "if you behave, I'll

keep my end of the bargain.” No, God just promises to never destroy the earth again with a flood.

Not only does God make the promise, but God gives us something as a reminder. It is a beautiful thing to behold. It causes people to catch their breath; to point to the sky, to stop in their tracks and admire it.

The rainbow is a sign of the covenant God made to all living things.

“I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud and I will remember My covenant.

The “sign” of the rainbow is so appropriate. It consists of the reflection of the rays of the sun in the particles of moisture in the clouds. The water which destroyed the earth causes the rainbow. Also, the rainbow appears at the end of a storm. So this sign assures us that the storm of God’s judgment (in a flood) is over.

Most interesting is the fact that the rainbow is not designed so much for humans benefit, but for God’s. God said that the rainbow would cause God to remember His covenant with humankind. What a comfort to know that God’s faithfulness is our guarantee.

This colorful promise was initiated and dictated by God. The sovereignty of God is clearly seen in the rainbow – **a reminder to God of God’s promise to all creation.**

What are the colors of promise? When God colors, they are red and orange, yellow and violet, blue and green ... they are arched high in the air for all to see.

They are the colors of love from the divine heart of God, a reminder to us that God is still with us. In times when we see destruction – even from natural means like hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornado’s – we have God’s abiding love helping us through.

And when we see evil that tries to take over, that devastates and would cause us to be paralyzed with fear, we see the colors of promise in the rainbow, and we remember that God is still sovereign, God is still ultimately in control of this world, and when we remember that, our eyes are opened to all the acts of goodness and kindness that continues to be here among us in our world.

The beautiful rainbow is a colorful sign of God’s promise. Yet, God didn’t stop there. In keeping the Covenant to preserve all of creation, God sent His Son. Jesus, the Christ, walking among humans, living with us, teaching us, loving and healing.

Jesus on a cross – a sign of life for all creation. The empty tomb – a promise of life fulfilled for us!

With all this promise we can, with confidence, go into the future knowing we don’t walk alone. Thanks be to God for the sign of the promise in the rainbow. And thanks be to God for the promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

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