

God's Ancient Reminder

10th Sun. after Pent. – 07/28/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Genesis 9:8-17 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 14-15a, [God says to Noah and his sons,] **“When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember My covenant that is between Me and you...”**.

Introduction

⊗ God told Noah and you and me today that when He sees His rainbow in the clouds, “I will remember...”. Does that mean that God has a bad memory? Does He need the rainbow, like a post-it note or a reminder on His smart phone because otherwise He might forget about the covenant that He made with Noah and all of his offspring after him?

→ I mean it has been just a bit since He first established that promise – somewhere around 4,500 years. And He has seen just a few things happen over the years throughout the history of His Creation up to this day.

⊗ Of course the answer is “No!” God’s all-knowing, all-powerful and always perfect nature has not and never can, or will change. Rest assured, God’s memory is fully in place.

→ The sign – His rainbow is the reminder for all of the rest of us; every man, woman and child ever to populate this earth after Noah and his three sons. It is God’s special and spectacular post-it note; His technicolor message posted up on the largest high definition screen ever, which we call the sky. And He posts it there as a reoccurring sign to remind us of the fact that after all these years He still remembers His covenant; His promise that He made with mankind on the day that Noah and his family walked out of the ark, unscathed from the only world-wide flood.

⊗ Yes, the rainbow is there in the sky for you and for me, dear friends. It is a “sign”; a direct message far greater than any phone call, telegram, email, text or video message we will ever receive pointing you; pointing me 1) to remember the world-wide flood and what caused it, 2) to live here and now in repentance and humility, and 3) to celebrate God’s love for us in gratitude; in confidence and in public praise of our Savior every day into eternity.

→ Let’s recount each of those three points in a little more detail for just a bit.

I. Remember the Flood and What Caused It

⊗ More than 100 years earlier, when God first directed Noah to begin building the ark, Genesis 6:5 tells us that “Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Then verses 12, 13, 17 tell us that “God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, ‘I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.’ ... For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die’.”

→ This concern; this problem with mankind still applies to each of us – and all of us today. Psalm 51:5 declares the fact that we are all born with an original sinful nature, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” And every one of us still struggles every day with the building guilt of the actual sins that we commit: 1 John 1:8, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

⊗ So, God hung the rainbow in the sky first to point Noah and each one of us back to God’s judgement when Adam and Eve committed the first sin, to the fact that every thought, word and action of disobedience against God; against His will brings the necessary result of death. There

is no “small” or “inconsequential” sin, my dear people. Every act of defiance against God brings the death penalty.

→ Which is why the flood was necessary, but even more it is why God’s first promise to Adam and Eve and every covenant that He made after that ultimately points us forward from that time to the ultimate requirement and the only hope for all of mankind, that is the sacrificial death of One; the only One ever to live in human flesh here on earth without original sin; without ever committing even one minute sin.

→ This One man was the seed of Eve that God promised would crush Satan’s head – Jesus, the sinless Son of God.

- ✘ This is where the rainbow points us all to focus our hearts and minds when we first see it in the sky. But, as we all know, we can’t see Jesus there in the rainbow unless we first recognize and confess our sinful part in why the flood had to come in the first place; why it was necessary for Jesus to die in our place.

II. Live in Repentance and Humility

- ✘ The second emphasis that God’s rainbow declares and intends for us all to remember is that once we have remembered the flood and our own sin’s part in causing it, now we are pointed by God to live from this moment forward in repentance and humility.

→ This is where God already takes ahold of our hearts and minds, and by His grace He begins to turn us back toward Him and His will for our existence.

- ✘ You see, over 100 years before the first drops of rain began to fall in that flood, God told Noah of His intended outcome; of the covenantal relationship that He intended to have with Noah and the rest of mankind after His necessary judgment had been completed.

→ In Genesis 6:17-18 God gives Noah a reason for hope. Immediately after He says, “Everything that is on the earth shall die.” God says, “But I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.” You see, God is the God of law and justice, yes. He’s the one who establishes what is right and what is wrong, not us. And when we ignore that; when we try to change that or act against it, then His consequence of death must be handed down.

→ But He is also the God of great mercy and compassion. God relates to the people at the time of the prophet Isaiah how His relationship with them reminds Him of His relationship with Noah and He says, “‘In overflowing anger for a moment I hid My face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,’ says Yahweh, your Redeemer. ‘This is like the days of Noah to Me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you’ (Is. 54:8-9).

- ✘ In God’s gift of repentance, this is where the rainbow points us to go in our relationship with God today as well; to see God’s undeserved love and grace in establishing His covenant with Noah and all of His offspring after him.

→ You and I; we are that offspring, which means that God established that covenant with each one of us here in the Ark of His Holy Christian Church right now today. It’s important that we see: this is a unilateral covenant, meaning that 1) God is the one who established it, not us; 2) God therefore is the one who set the terms, not us; and 3) God is the only one able to keep those terms.

- ✘ And what are the actual terms of this promise that impacts every person and every creature here on earth ever since that day? Verse 11, God said, “I establish My covenant with you, that 1)

never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and 2) never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” That’s good news; great hope for all creatures and for all the earth.

→ God said in verses 12-13, “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: I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.”

✘ So, what does all of that mean? First, there’s no confusion; no vagueness in this text. The rainbow is God’s sign to us! It is not a sign that we have any authority to change, hijack or use His sign – that is His rainbow, for anything but God’s intended purpose!

→ If there was such a thing as trademark or copyright laws back then, the rainbow would absolutely be understood to be the trademarked and copyrighted “sign” or “logo” for God and His “no-more-world-wide-flood” promise. The rainbow is God’s visible guarantee to the entire human race; His sign of salvation by grace!

→ We see the rainbow and it should move us to remember all that we talked about before regarding the flood and our sinful part in it, and then it should humble us before Jesus at the cross; leading us to spend some time in reflection over all that Jesus endured to save us. Why? because friends, we could all so easily be like those mocking Noah as he built the ark, or even worse those mocking Yahweh when He called the people to repentance and faith; hoping not to send the flood.

✘ Let’s be honest, today God’s anger is certainly stoked at the despicable ways that His sign; His rainbow is being used to mock Him and His truth. We’ve all seen it, how the rainbow is used to promote beliefs that are the opposite of God’s Creation and will; how it is abused for cutesy displays with fairies and unicorns; for symbols of good luck with leprechauns and promises of pots of gold.

→ These are not just harmless displays or ideas folks. They are the devil’s ploy to use the rainbow to distract our attention away from God and His covenant of love and grace. And if we have had even a tiny part in allowing or promoting these lies and abuses of God’s beautiful rainbow, then seeing it should point us now to live in repentance and humility before our Lord and Savior.

III. Celebrate His Love for Us...

✘ Then we are prepared and excited to have the rainbow point us toward God’s ultimate goal: that is to celebrate His love for us in three ways.

→ First, we celebrate God’s love in gratitude; filled with thanksgiving for God’s undeserved, yet constant mercy to us sinners. Not only did He save Noah and his family, but He has also saved each one of us through the flood of His grace in our baptism. It’s there that God connected us directly to Jesus’ death on the cross – drowning our sinful nature as well as the guilt of our sin-filled lives. But that’s not all, in baptism He has raised us with Jesus as well, giving us new life in Christ’s victory over sin, death and devil.

→ Second, we celebrate God’s love in confidence, that is filled with faith in all of His promises. Just as it was for Noah, Abraham, Moses and so many others with whom God established His covenants, so today He has filled you and me with His Holy Spirit’s gift of faith. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” It is this gift of faith that protects each of us today from the temptation to doubt God; to question His Word and His promises of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life in Jesus. And boy do we need to celebrate this confidence God has given us, because the devil’s lies are taking over so many people’s hearts today; trying to entice us out of and away from God and His protective ark within the flood of sin; His Church. In today’s Epistle Reading Paul encourages us to “be

strengthened” with the power of God’s Spirit “so that Christ may dwell in our hearts” so we will be “rooted and grounded in (His) love” (Eph. 3:16-17).

→ And third, the rainbow points us to celebrate God’s love in public praise. Did God intend His covenant to be a private; a secret understanding just among us believers in His Church? Absolutely not! He hung His sign up in the sky for all people to see. It can’t be more obvious. His will is that His rainbow will be the sign through which He reminds every one of us Christians to publicly praise and proclaim Him, His covenant, His saving work and His love for all souls around the world.

⊗ It’s amazing when you actually think about this great gift God has given us. In order to hang His bow up there in the sky and remind us that He is always faithful; that He will never forget His promise never to separate from us again through a flood, what does God use? He uses water itself; the water left over from a storm, through which He shines with the brilliance of His sun in just the right way to point us to remember; to reflect upon and to celebrate His love for us in and through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. To Him be all glory and praise, today and forever! Amen.