

Text: Genesis 9:8-17

Theme: “A Sign of God’s Grace for the World”

There are some cultures in our world, especially some Native American and Asian Cultures, which look at rainbows as evil things. In the Hmong Culture the word for “rainbow” is “the Dragon Rises.” I believe that it is one of the most fearful and evil signs for them.

On the other hand, you have the Irish, who believe that there is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. In western culture rainbows as something that is good and pleasant. Songs have been written about rainbows, “Somewhere over the Rainbow.” (I love the Iz version) or Kermit the Frog singing “The Rainbow connection.” You might remember the Care Bears. Cheer Bear has a rainbow on its belly. William Wordsworth wrote a poem which says in part,

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;

So be it when I shall grow old...

There is also the way that the Bible looks at rainbows as a sign of God’s grace for the world.

I. A rainbow is God’s bow in this sinful world.

A. This world can be a very dark and dreary place. Before Noah entered the ark and after he exited it, God said that the inclination of our hearts is evil, ever since our youth. When God created the world, it was good. We were good. There was no evil. But when Adam and Eve sinned, everything changed. Their oldest son became the first murderer. By the time that Noah lived, people were not only doing evil things, but they were thinking evil thoughts all of the time. The world was full of violence, hatred, envy, and selfish ambition. It got to the point that God was even sorry that he created the world and especially man. He decided to destroy the whole thing with a flood.

Today’s world is still full the same vices that plagued the world during Noah’s day – violence greed, selfish ambition and pride, sexual immorality, and so many other things. Our hearts are inclined toward evil, sadly even for us as Christians. Even Paul lamented, “*The good that I would that I do not, no the evil that I do not, this I do.*” We all find ourselves wrestling with evil thoughts, desires, and deeds. Like Paul we wind up saying about ourselves, “*O wretched man that I am!*”

In contrast the rainbow is a symbol of God’s glory. The prophet Ezekiel saw God in all of His glory. He says that the light shining around God was like a rainbow in the clouds. (1:28) John mentions rainbows twice in his visions of heaven in the book of Revelation. He writes in 4:3 that a rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne of God. Later in 10:1 he writes that an angel came from heaven, robed in a cloud, and wrapped with a rainbow above His head. On Ascension Day I spoke of the cloud of God’s glory that is often mentioned in the Scriptures. When the light and the cloud of God’s glory mix, there is apparently the most beautiful rainbow, which is beyond our imagination. The rainbow in heaven occurs because of the Glory of God.

II. When the rainbow appears on earth, it is a reminder of the grace of God.

It is a reminder for us. Noah came out of the ark. If you have ever been to an area that has been flooded, it looks very grey and desolate. The first thing that Noah did was to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. God smelled “the pleasing aroma” and promised, *I will never again strike down every living creature as I have done*. Then He gave the same charge to Noah that He gave to Adam to be fruitful and multiply. In addition to the green plants, God also now allowed Noah to eat meat. Then Noah saw the rainbow. Imagine this scene. He saw those beautiful colors over this earth that had been so devastated because of sin. That rainbow was the sign of God’s covenant that he would never bring such a devastating flood to the world again. It is the promise that God’s glory will not be removed from this world.

That reminds me of those opening words of John’s Gospel, that in Christ we have seen God’s glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. Christ came into this sinful world to bear our sins. Our thoughts, words, and deeds have been evil. His were always perfect, but He, the sinless Lamb of God, bore all of our guilt on the cross. For a few hours the world was dark. For a few days it looked hopeless, but He rose from the dead, and our Savior and was taken up by the cloud into the glory of heaven. In Christ God’s glory has come to earth. We trust in Him and, our sins are forgiven. We are washed clean of our sins in Holy Baptism and placed into the holy ark of God’s church. When we look to Christ we can take heart in the forgiveness of sins, the faithfulness of our Savior in the good and bad of this life, and we have the hope that one day we will see God in all of His glory in heaven. Christ has come to bring salvation to this fallen world. When we hear His Word, are baptized in His name or receive His Supper, we are reminded of the grace that we have through Him. Those things assure us that He will always be our Savior and Lord. As Jesus says in our Gospel lesson, we can always take heart because He is near.

The rainbow is also a reminder to God. Twice God told Noah that whenever he sees the rainbow, He will remember His covenant. God doesn’t really forget, but the rainbow in the clouds is a sign to Him of His grace for us. He remembers that He will not judge us according to our sins, but give us His grace for the sake of Christ our Lord. The rainbow stills God’s wrath and fills His heart with compassion, kindness and forgiveness for all creatures that He has made.

Rainbows are really a beautiful part of God’s creation. I still remember to this day a beautiful double rainbow that I saw over Lake Michigan, near Manitowoc, about 30 years ago. But for the Christian, they are not just a thing of beauty. They are a reminder of God’s grace to this world, both that He will never send such a devastating world-wide flood because of His wrath, but also of His grace to us all through our Savior Jesus Christ. May rainbows always be a sign to us of God’s goodness and grace to us on this earth. Amen.

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