

Wade in the Water 11: After the Flood, the Rainbow
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Genesis 9:8-17
John 14:18-27

“When the bow is in the clouds,
I will look upon it and remember. . .”
Genesis 9:16a

How many of you have seen a rainbow?

– the “bow in the clouds” of Genesis?

Not an everyday occurrence – but something most of us have seen sometime.

Did you know that the rainbow was created by God to be a reminder to God?

God’s post-it note?

“I will look upon it and remember. . .”

Someone else has translated that verse:

God said: “The bow shall be in the cloud; when I see it, **it will remind me . . .**”

God’s reminder to God’s self of what?

God said to Noah after the Great flood: “When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember **my covenant** which 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.**” (9:14-15)

Did you ever think of God needing to be reminded?

“Ah yes, the rainbow! That reminds me, no matter how evil people are, I will not destroy!”

Like I said, God’s post-it note: “Don’t destroy.” -- no matter how much we deserve it, God is reminded of God’s promise not to destroy us (at least not by water)!

And if God put the rainbow there as a reminder to God – God **also** put the rainbow in the sky as a reminder to **us** – a reminder that no matter how dark, there is hope.

The rainbow is a lasting sign of hope for us.

How we read God's sign of hope determines how we live our lives – and vice versa, how we live our lives determines how we read God's sign of hope

Hope – hope is different from the Little Mary Sunshine Syndrome.

Have you ever known a sufferer from the Little Mary Sunshine Syndrome: a view of the world absolutely certain that all things will come out right in the end.

“God's in his heaven, all's well with the world.”

Keep a smile on your face, the sun will shine brightly and sweetly.

I once heard some who had encountered one too many Little Mary Sunshines say: “They said, ‘Look up, things could be worse.’ So I looked up, and guess what, things did get worse.”

We are sophisticated enough to know that things do not always come out right in the end.

Floods will happen, earthquakes bring untold suffering, wars keep breaking out in places we never heard of, ideologues think an idea is worth killing for.

It is that sophistication which gives us so much trouble with God's promise of the rainbow as a sign of hope.

The rainbow God of hope seems not much different than Little Mary Sunshine.

Which brings me to a fourth century monk named Evagrius Ponticus.

Ever heard of him? No?

Few have -- living in the second century, how could he possibly say anything worth repeating to this complicated age?

Back in the fourth century Evagrius had a great time pulling together a list of eight human frailties which later became known as the “Seven Deadly Sins.”

The kind of sins guaranteed to cut us off from God, from any hope of relationship with God.

Cut us off from hope.

One of the deadly sins had a special name, “acedia.”

Acedia was defined as “the varieties and derivatives of disgust with life.”

To put it another way, “the dis-ease which comes because a person has given up hope.”

Listen to the symptoms of acedia: laziness, weariness, lack of joy, sadness, tedium, boredom, hatred of life.

Did you every think of boredom, weariness with life, tedium, as theological problems?

To Evagrius and his successors they are symptoms of no hope in God’s promise.

They are symptoms of a person who sees no way in which God could possibly form the Kingdom of Heaven out of the raw material of this world.

Acedia was later dropped from the list, therefore Seven Deadly Sins.

It’s interesting why it was dropped.

Some people decided that laziness, boredom, lack of joy came from considering too much the miseries of the world.

In other words, it was the world’s fault.

In recent years I have heard of an addiction to cable TV news called CNN Syndrome. During a national catastrophe some people cannot turn off their televisions. For hours, days, they watch the same news broadcast over and over again – becoming more and more depressed as they watch.

So with acedia.

AS soon as the world became the cause of the weariness, then it was no longer a sin.

It has become a disease, rather than a sin.

A dis-ease – a disorder which comes from the state of the world.

Has nothing to do with the choices we make, and the responsibility we have for our choices. Certainly has nothing to do with our relationship to God.

So what happened? The rainbow vanished from the sky as a sign of God’s covenant of hope.

It was now nothing more than particles of water refracting light.

With the assumption that particles of water explained the rainbow, came also the assumption that God had little or nothing to do with the world.

The sign of hope had disappeared.

The reminder to God was gone.

The reminder to us that God remembered his relationship with the world was gone.

Our suffering was the result of the misery of the world – not the result of our relationship with God.

All gone

Of the two extremes of hope, Little Mary Sunshine and acedia, I suspect we get caught in the last one the most.

I have not met many people who agree with Little Mary Sunshine that all is right with the world.

But acedia is insidious, and omnipresent in our lives, whether we think of it as a sin or as a dis-ease.

We focus so much on the world that we forget the other reality.

We feel so shipwrecked that we think we are marooned.

But there is always hope.

I'm suggesting that the genius of the Christian hope is the both-and, the opposites at the same time.

The history of Israel through the Old Covenant, the testimony of the witnesses of the New, clearly testify that shipwreck happens to people, nations, the world.

But we are never marooned in the despair. Hope is what we are up to.

When we assemble together, when we pray, when we infiltrate the world, we are the bringers of the hope of God.

We are the rememberers – God's reminders for our world. And remembering is hope.

There is a delightful section in Jesus' farewell to the disciples:

(John 14:22-26)

Jesus is saying good bye and assuring his followers that they will not be alone – God will send a Counselor to them, the Holy Spirit, of whom Jesus says: “he will teach you all things, and **remind you of** all that I have said to you.”

Remembering is the best antidote for acedia – whether it is sin or disease!

Every time we remember – recall -- to ourselves and to others the teaching, the person of Jesus, we have been given the new sign of the rainbow. The sign of the Spirit of God.

In turn, we become the living sign to the world.

We remind the world that we are not finally shipwrecked, but underway.

We remind the world that history, our history, the history of the State College Presbyterian Church and its people -- is the material of God’s Kingdom of Heaven.

God's Kingdom has begun - we are under way, not shipwrecked.

Hope in God is an all encompassing, general kind of hope.

It does not deny the particular pains, woes, tragedies of this life.

But it breaks through our tendency to acedia, and reminds us of God.

Of what God has given us.

Of the work God has given us.

Of what we still have to do for God.

Tell me, knowing that God has given us sure and certain signs of his presence, how can we lack joy in general; particularly in prayer?

How can we despair in general, particularly in prayer?

How can we despair in general, particularly of our own salvation?

When the tedium, boredom, and doubt of our world overwhelm us and fill us with despair, they try to keep us from seeing God’s rainbow.

God’s reminder of everlasting hope.

Acedia is a theological dis-ease.

An offense to the sign God has already given.

Look up.

When you see the bow in the sky, remember, and think on these things.

Amen