

## **Genesis 9:8-17**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text for this morning is the ending of the familiar story of Noah and the Ark, “I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 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 and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

We all know this story. It’s covered in almost every story Bible out there so it’s one of the first Bible stories that we learn.

Of course, it's always sanitized and simplified. So many people take issue with this, noting that only having two of every animal is silly. Of course, if one actually reads the Biblical text, they would see that it wasn't two of every animal. It's true. Look it up. In fact, there have been good, faithful Christians who have done studies and models of the ark showing the viability of the Biblical narrative.

But that is not the text or the task that is before us today. Rather, today we see God making the first covenant in Scripture. And covenant was an important thing in the ancient world. A covenant was a contract. It was a binding agreement between two parties. Each party of the covenant had to bring something to the table.

And this is absolutely the way that we see things go in our world, even if we don't use the word covenant as much anymore. People have been making agreements for the entirety

of civilization. If you have something that I want, and I have something that you want, the best way for us to be happy without resulting in bloodshed is to make a deal. If it is a deal that is going to last longer than just this moment, then a covenant is made between the parties for continued cooperation for mutual benefit.

And in our text today, we see God making a covenant with not just Noah, but a covenant with all flesh, with every living thing on the planet. This includes even the future generations that have yet to be born. This is a covenant that God continues to bind himself to today, even though Noah and his family are all long gone. So, what does God put forward as his part of the covenant? He promises to never flood the earth again. He promises that the utter and global destruction that came as a result of that catastrophic flood will never be repeated everywhere. That's a pretty good thing to get from God, yeah?

We've seen recently what heavy rains can do in a localized area, and a worldwide flood would be just as disastrous today as it was in Noah's time.

But what is put forward as the other half of this covenant? What does Noah and his family promise to do? Look in your bulletins at the text in front of you. Do you see Noah promising to be faithful to God? Do you see his sons promising to continue to teach the truth of God to their children? Do you see the lions and tigers coming and giving their promises? You don't see anything do you? From ants to zebras, from aardvarks to zorillas (which are a real thing, I had to google it) there are no promises made. All the flesh that is benefitting from God promising to not flood the earth and establishing a covenant are strangely silent. In this case, there aren't even crickets.

Why is that? I thought that a covenant had two sides. God certainly doesn't seem like the kind of fellow to click "agree" to

the terms and conditions without reading them all, does he? And yet God here is getting a bad deal. He's giving up his rightful authority to punish and wipe out creation with a flood and he gets nothing in return. But you see, this is easily explainable.

The truth is, we have nothing that God needs! There is absolutely nothing that we have that he needs or must have.

God does not require your worship or your devotion as though he needs it to strengthen him or make him real. God does not need your money. He is the creator of the universe, the one who sits on the throne of heaven. He has no need for US currency. God does not need your good works. If there is something that he needs done and you don't do it, he'll get someone else. No, we have absolutely nothing to bring to God, nothing that makes us indispensable on our own. Even our much-lauded hearts that we can give to Jesus are broken by

suffering, stained by sin, and often given less than freely and quickly taken back given half a chance.

But that is who our God is. He is the God who makes the bad deals. He binds himself with his promises and his Word even though he doesn't have to. He makes covenants with his people that require nothing of us, but rest entirely on his shoulders. This is what we see fulfilled in a far better way in Christ.

On the night when he was betrayed, he gave us his own blood as the blood of a new testament, blood that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. We are recipients of this grace and beneficiaries of this testament, this promise. We don't have anything in us that should make Jesus want to forgive our sins. We continue each and every day as stubborn, angry, arrogant, and unrepentant sinners. But yet he calls us back to himself. He reminds us of the wonderful promises of the Gospel

and we turn to him in repentance and faith. And he gets no benefit from it. But he does it only out of his divine love for you and for me.

In the same way, Jesus is the ultimate recipient of the bad deals where he gave up much to receive little. Indeed, he gave up everything, including his very life at the cross so that you and I would be redeemed from the curse of the Law and the eternal death that awaits all who are lost in their sins. And this was something that had no tangible benefit for Jesus. He wasn't hanging on the cross thinking about how this was going to change everything so that he could finally become successful, or rich, or finally get a wife. No, he was agonizing over the fact that he had been abandoned by the Father himself. Jesus gave up even his own connection to his Father so that he could take away your sins and mine. That is who our God is, that is who our Savior is.

He is the God who takes the bad deals. He's the God who makes the bad deals. And we are grateful for this simple fact because it is the foolishness of God that is wiser than that of man. We would never be worthy of redemption or salvation if left on our own or judged by what we can offer God. Indeed, none of us are worthy of redemption, yet Christ has given that very thing to you freely and completely through the faith that you were given by the Holy Spirit. Make no mistake, our salvation is by no means fair. It is absolutely not given to us fairly, but rather it is given unfairly to our benefit.

And because we have this life, freedom, and salvation, we are free to live out our faith. We seek to serve God by serving our neighbor. We have been given opportunities to serve our neighbors because they need our aid and our care. God cares for our neighbors often through the things that we, his people, do in his name. In the same way, God does not have need of our

money, but he invites us to come and be part of his holy Church, and our offerings go to support the work of the Church both here and abroad. God does not need our worship or thanks either, but he gladly receives our praise and adoration like a loving parent who receives with joy the flawed works of their children. Even more, when we gather for worship, that is when God gives us the very gifts and blessings that he longs to give. We don't gather to do him a favor, but rather he is the one giving us the benefit.

And so for us who are in Christ, who are the grateful recipients of his love and grace, we have received comfort from our God. He will indeed never destroy the world with water, but he does promise in Revelation that the world will ultimately and finally be destroyed in fire before being reestablished in the new creation. On that day, we will have no reason to fear the flames or the wrath of God because it has been paid for by Christ. We

can point not to the covenant made by God with Noah, but the covenant made by God through his Son Jesus Christ. On that day, we will gladly rejoice at the coming of our savior who has done so much for us only out of his love and not for the sake of what he could get from us. May we always look to our God and see that in his fervent love for us, he takes the bad deals because he sees that you and the rest of his people are worth it. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life everlasting.

Amen.