

“WHERE ARE THE RAINBOWS IN YOUR LIFE?”

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Text: Genesis 7, 8 and 9

Recently on TV I saw an interview with the artist Robert Indiana who in the 1960's and '70's made the Beatles song "What The World needs Is Love" the theme for his artistic work. He did so because he said he thought that was truly what the world needed at that time. His work based on the song became very popular because it captured the mood of that era. Then the interviewer asked the artist what was the theme of his work in our day. Do you know what his response was? Mr. Indiana replied, "Today the theme for my work is 'What the world needs is hope'." Would you agree with that assessment? I know that as I travel around the Presbytery a lot of people are discouraged about the future of the church and when I talk with friends about the economy or things in Albany and Washington there is a great deal of pessimism. I walk the track at Roberts Wesleyan with a good friend and we talk about what is going on in the world. Usually we end up jokingly commenting, "Boy, this was a cheery way to start the day!"

All of these experiences got me to thinking about Paul's well-known comment about "faith, hope and love." Paul said the greatest of these is love but aren't there times when hope becomes a key ingredient for pushing on in life?

If I am correct in suggesting that hope in God and hope for the future are essential in our day then where in such times would you turn in the Bible to find a message of hope? There are many options but my Biblical recommendation may surprise you.

The story of the flood in the Book of Genesis is one of the best-known parts of scripture. Go to any craft shop and you will see all kinds of items relating to Noah and the Ark. It's what 's called a "big collectable" right now. If you ever have heard Bill Cosby's record about Noah, a marvelous comical satire, then, the story of this man trying to gather up all those animals is firmly etched in your mind. The trouble is that with all its familiarity we tend to miss the main point. We spend so much time, along with Bill Cosby, worrying about those animals - where are those kangaroos? How am I to know a male mosquito from a female? - that we totally overlook what comes at the end of the story. The tale is ever so familiar but we forget there's a rainbow when the flood ends!

As with all of scripture, Noah building the ark is much more than simply a fascinating tale but rather is intended to call attention to a serious

theological statement: **GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT HIS PEOPLE**. This concern, as with any parent, is two-fold: there is a desire for children to live faithful and just lives and an unbelievable love is offered at all times regardless of how the children are behaving.

That doesn't mean that God isn't concerned about our shortcomings. Have we ever thought of the pathos in this verse from the story: "and the Lord was sorry he had made human beings...?" I am sure that God must weep when He views the turmoil in the Middle East, the suicide bombings, the centuries of unrest, the refugee camps, in the very location which is the birth place of three major faiths and of western civilization! Surely our behavior, personally and internationally, causes God great anguish!

BUT, and what a big little word that is, there is amazing grace. It is no accident that our last hymn is so beloved; it touches something deep within all of us. God cares more intensely for his children than even the typical parent. The ultimate expression of this concern is the gift of Jesus of Nazareth, not merely a babe in a manger but a grown man giving his life in order to get God's message of redemption into the hearts and lives of people.

The story keeps coming back to the Creator's desire to reach out and restore the relationship with his children. You will note if you read Genesis 9 again that the pledge to Noah is distinguished from many other covenant agreements in the Bible. Those covenants generally promise that God will look after his people Israel but in Genesis 9 all of humanity is included in the divine blessing! It is because the Bible tells us of God's concern for all of his children that we struggle with how best to deal with the hunger and poverty that is so prevalent in our world. Thus, isn't one of the implications of this passage that an important part of any church's ministry needs to be outreach to those who are suffering from injustice? No easy answers spring forth but the people of God are challenged to look for the most just way to deal with human tensions, whether we are talking about the Middle East, the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti and now Chile or life in the family.

The story of Noah reminds us that God's purpose is not to destroy the world despite what you may hear from radio or TV evangelists. God's intention is to redeem the world, to make it a place of love and justice and that is cause for great hope.

Think of the good feelings that come when one sees a rainbow. A friend gave us a solar-power crystal that produces circling rainbows as the sun hits it. It is placed in our kitchen window and what a joy when it seems

as if winter has been around forever to sit in the kitchen and watch rainbows spinning around the room. Just because our world is far from perfect, we need to look for the rainbows, the signs of God's presence and activity.

The rainbow symbolizes hope in the story of the flood and isn't hope one of the greatest gifts that Christianity can offer to our world right now? People understandably are worried about wars that go on and on, the economy that is too slow to recover and global warming that may get worse but God has not forsaken his people. He has promised to guide us through whatever life brings. That doesn't mean there always is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Lots of people place their hope in such things only to discover as Dorothy did in "The Wizard of Oz" that the Grand Wizard may not be so grand after all. God's promise to be there in this life and that which is to come is what really keeps people going and brings them the same feeling as seeing a rainbow after a storm.

Now let's be clear we are not just talking about hope. We need to live into that hope. To paraphrase the words of the hymn that we will be singing shortly

Live into hope of captives freed, of sight regained, the end of greed
Live into hope the blind shall see with insight and with
clarity, removing shades of pride and fear, a vision of our God
brought near.

God now proclaims our full release to faith and hope and joy and peace.

But we have to live into that kind of life! It's no good going from worship wishing for better days unless we plan to light a small candle in our own areas of darkness.

The Bible, beginning in Genesis, is all about an agreement, a covenant that is a crucial part of our faith commitment. God has declared, "**I WILL BE YOUR GOD.**" By the manner in which we live each day we also declare "**WE WILL BE YOUR PEOPLE.**" That's when the divine/human partnership moves into high gear. God is there and always will be but we have to do our part. by trying to make Christ the center of our lives, which is more than just a shallow affirmation of faith but a deep and sincere effort to shape each day around his way! It's Noah, it's Abraham and Sarah, it's Moses and Miriam, it's the disciples and its us! It's a binding relationship based on the solid foundation of knowing that God will not let us down.

One bitter cold day this winter I was getting gas at the local Kwik Fill. An elderly gentleman came out of the store and I made some complaint about the weather. His quick reply set me back: "Yea, it is cold but at least we are alive."

His comment certainly got me back on track. Every day, good or bad, nasty or sunny, is a time to think about rainbows...about our covenant with our Maker; it's a matter of looking for rainbows and sharing that hope with others.

The next time you are on Elmwood Ave driving by Strong Hospital notice the small banners on the lamp posts that declare, "Hope lifts our hearts." How true that is and that is why it is time to ask: **WHERE ARE THE RAINBOWS IN MY LIFE?**