

Genesis 9:8-17 & Mark 6:45-56
“Do Not Be Afraid!”
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

July 25, 2021
First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Eight people are left on earth. Noah and his family had witnessed the extinction of a world of men and beasts. They – *along with two of every kind of creature* – had been saved. They were surrounded by the evidence of the destruction worked by God in His righteous wrath against sin. Noah and his family were frightened. They were wondering: “What’s next?” What doom was on the horizon?

We also have the Twelve apostles. They, too, were terrified! As they were struggling against the currents upon the Sea of Galilee, they see what looks to be a specter or ghost or could it be the Leviathan? They all believed a watery grave awaited them.

These twenty people – *the eight on the ark and the 12 on the boat* – all were full of fear and trembling.

On this Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, God’s voice comes to calm all fear as He says, ***“I establish my covenant with you. Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid!”*** (Genesis 9:9, Mark 6:50)

[God’s Covenant]

Only eight people are left on the earth. They had seen the perils of water, but now they have seen God’s delivery from water. They had seen God’s righteous wrath against sin. Now, it is God Himself who makes the most solemn and binding promise that He can make to man.

God spoke: ***“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth”*** (Genesis 9:9-11).

This divine covenant is not anything that we can pledge. This is a pledge to us from God. This covenant is bound to God Himself to carry out. And this covenant was not made only to Noah and his sons, but this covenant includes every one of their descendants: you and me!

God did not stop there, He gave Noah, his family, you and me an additional proof and guarantee that He would execute His covenant with Himself. God spoke saying, ***“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. ... When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between [Me] and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth”*** (Genesis 9:12-13, 16).

As Noah and his family were in need of assurance, God gave them this assurance: He would never again cause the extinction of the world through a world-wide flood.

We can only imagine what Noah and his family were thinking. Certainly, they were in awe of the words of God and of His covenant promise as He spoke: ***“Whenever the rainbow appears in the sky, I will remember my covenant between Me and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth”*** (Genesis 9:16).

Now, why would God need a way to remember His covenant promise? How could God forget? Of course, God never forgets His promises. This is God saying that the terms of His covenant between Himself and us would always be before Him.

But, unlike the triune God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – we are prone to forget. Today, how many in society, when they see a rainbow in the sky recall God’s covenant promise to Noah and us? Many may think of the Great Flood, but it is likely that most will not recall God’s covenant promise that He made to you and me.

In recent times, the sinful culture has pronounced a new meaning to the rainbow. It is no longer about God's covenant with us. It is now a pronouncement that there is no need to lead a chaste and decent life with what we say and do. The culture pronounces that those who live contrary to God's intention of marriage are in fact "born this way." Now, I used to argue against the phrase "born this way," but now I understand it. I actually agree with it. Yes, we are all born "this way," we – *you, me, and every person upon this earth* – are born as enemies of God (Romans 5:10), due to sin, which every human being inherited from our first parents: Adam and Eve.

But while we were God's enemy, He sent His Son to reconcile us to Himself – *and all by grace through faith in His Son*. Now, this doesn't mean that we continue to live in our sin. Instead, we repent and confess our sins to God and receive His forgiveness.

You see, sin at its core, separates us from God. Sin separates us from His everlasting covenant with you and me.

The Sixth Commandment "***You shall not commit adultery***" does not apply to only husbands and wives. This commandment applies to all human beings, whether married or not, or cohabitating, and to all kinds of sexual desire and activity. God says that we are to fear and love Him by refraining from lustful desire or activity of any kind, whether heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or otherwise. We are to live sexually pure lives in modesty and in self-control. And our identity is not in our sexual preference, whether that be gay, straight, or otherwise.

Remember, our identity is in our Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection (*for which we have witnessed again here this morning, as God adopted Aiden*). Through our Baptism into Christ, we are God's children and thus, heirs of heaven. Since our identity is in Christ, we trust in God's grace knowing that it is sufficient for us, and we look to Christ daily for forgiveness, strength, and contentment.

So, let God's rainbow in the sky help us remember that He has kept His covenant promise these many centuries. There has been no world-wide flood. He has kept His promise, and He keeps every promise. Even the promise of the Savior.

[Terror Upon the Sea]

As God calmed the fears of Noah, the Twelve disciples thought they were about to be succumbed to a watery grave. Now, unlike when Jesus calmed the storm previously in Mark 4(:35-41), the disciples this time had no danger of drowning. The Sea of Galilee this night was just being unfavorable. You see, the sea is not the problem. What terrifies them is seeing Jesus and not understanding who He is.

After the disciples had struggled for hours upon the sea, Jesus makes His way to them – as He walked upon the sea.

It is likely the disciples yearned for Jesus as they fought the sea currents, but when Jesus finally arrives, every disciple comes to fear and trembling. *“It is a ghost!”*

You would think that when Jesus finally comes that the disciples would become calm. This is the same Jesus who displayed His divine mastery to the disciples over wind and wave just recently. It appears that they forgot.

Instead as Jesus comes closer to them, they all cry out, *“It is a ghost!”*

You see, the disciples believed that Jesus was a ghost, or worse! This is what is terrifying them. It is not a matter of the sea. There are no crashing waves. There is no storm. It is only Jesus. The Twelve believed that a watery grave was their fate.

In their fear, Jesus speaks to them, ***“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid”*** (Mark 6:50). Here, Jesus speaks His covenant name: ***I am***. This is the same name that God spoke to Moses. This is the same name God spoke to Noah and his family. ***“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”*** This is the incarnate God speaking to His disciples and to us saying, *“Wherever you are, you are never away from My care. If I am with you, you have nothing to fear.”*

Now, who or what are your ghosts? What do you fear? Are we trusting in something or someone that is not helpful for you? If we are trusting in anything other than the one true God, then we should be very afraid. But when Jesus is there – when we call upon Him for security – we have nothing to be afraid of at all. So, when ***“It is I”*** – the ***“I”*** being Jesus, the ***“I am”*** – then we have nothing to fear.

[Little Faith]

After witnessing the feeding of the 5,000, and so many other signs and miracles performed by Jesus right in front of their very eyes, the disciples should have understood so much more than they did. They should not have been so ***“utterly astounded”*** (Mark 6:51) at witnessing Jesus walk upon the sea. They should have comprehended that the One who had multiplied the loaves of bread, calmed the sea, healed the sick, and raised the dead, could really walk on the water.

Just as it was when Jesus calmed the storm, as we heard just weeks ago, the disciples still do not understand who Jesus is. Like the crowds – *who “ate and were satisfied”* (Mark 6:42) *when Christ fed the 5,000* – His disciples couldn’t see what was right before their very eyes. Some thought He was just a prophet, some thought He was a bread king, others thought He was just a great teacher. Who is Jesus? As Jesus earlier spoke to them after calming the sea saying, ***“Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”*** (Mark 4:40), we hear today that the disciples’ hearts were hardened. Now, this has nothing to do with rejecting God’s truth. Rather, this ***“hardening”*** is the spiritual condition of the disciples, which is the ***“littleness of faith.”*** Indeed, they have some faith – *a little faith* – but this faith needs to grow into understanding who Jesus truly is: God in the flesh.

We, too, often have little faith. We – *like the disciples* – often don’t see what is right in front of us. We often turn to fear. We begin to trust in people or things that promise relief and safety, but in reality, they only promise what they could never fulfil. Even in our little faith, God the Father doesn’t give up on us. Despite our little faith, He sent Jesus to be our Savior from sin, eternal death, and hell.

So, turn to the one true God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who always fulfills His promises and says: ***“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you”*** (Deuteronomy 31:6).

God comes to us today to serve us as He did Noah and the disciples. He serves us through His Word and Sacraments. He comes to us today to take upon Himself our fears and increase our faith.

Unlike the triune God who never forgets His covenant promise, He comes to us today to remind us that the powers of sin, death, and Satan are defeated through the power of Jesus' atoning death upon the Cross and His bodily resurrection from the dead! This we need to hear repeatedly, because unlike God, we are prone to forget. We are prone to forget how God so loves us so much that He took it upon Himself to save us from sin's power, which is eternal death. He comes to us today speaking this promise of forgiveness of sins, which guarantees eternal life and salvation. He comes to us today reminding us all that we have nothing to fear, since we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone!

In the Lord's Supper, Jesus pledges Himself to you and me as He says He will never leave us or forsake us. All we have to do is trust in Him. Through the very Words of Christ, "***This is My body***" and "***This is My blood,***" Jesus speaks to us another special covenant promise: that in this Sacrament, Christ's saving death is proclaimed, and the fruits of His atonement are distributed for the forgiveness of our sins. "***For as often as [we] eat this bread and drink the cup, [we] proclaim the Lord's death until He comes***" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Unlike the sick at Gennesaret – *who undoubtedly heard about the miracle healing of the woman with the 12 years of the flow of blood (Mark 5:25-34)* – we don't get to touch only a fringe of Christ's garment for our healing. Instead, Jesus invites us to touch Him and taste Him as He takes our sins away through our eating and drinking of His body and blood under the bread and wine.

Although God never forgets His covenant promise, there is something that God does forget. You see, when we repent of our sins – *all that we have done against God in our thoughts, words, or deeds* – He immediately forgets that sin. God the Father immediately sees us as He sees His Son as perfectly righteous. It is by faith in Christ alone that our sin and fear are taken away! In response to this grace, we "***give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever***" (Psalm 136:1).

Yes, God's steadfast love endures forever and so does His covenant, so "***Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid!***" (Mark 6:50) Amen!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠