

FIRST in Series: "A **ROY G BIV** LENT" -- Remember -- Genesis 9:8-17  
St Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent (February 22,) 2015

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup> "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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." <sup>12</sup> And God said, "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:<sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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." <sup>17</sup> 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."

This is the story of "after the flood" – the story of things after Noah, his family and the animals (2 x 2) were saved from the flood that destroyed the whole earth.

I know, I know – there are some who would rather not encounter nor discuss the stories of the First Testament; those who want to stay just in the New Testament.

However, I contend that – even when it is not recognized – MOST of our whole theology and outlook on life is based upon how we read the stories of the first 12 chapters of the book of Genesis.

How people encounter today's story tells me much of how they look at life, at God, and at themselves. Is the Noah story a story of judgment and destruction, or is it a story of redemption and promise?

In the classic Lakota book of wisdom "**Keep Going – the Art of Perseverance,**"<sup>1</sup> Jeremy, the young man whose father had just died of cancer went to his grandfather, Old Hawk, for consolation and advice. Early on in the narrative, Grandfather told him:

In life there is sadness as well as joy, losing as well as winning, falling as well as standing, hunger as well as plenty, bad as well as good. I do not say this to make you despair, but to teach you reality. ... Life wears two faces and one is no less real than the other. If everything were the same all the time, there would be no variety, no excitement, and no balance. ... A good lesson to remember: although one reality may obscure or diminish another, one cannot eliminate another. Perhaps in the end, the one perspective we gain is that one reality defines another.

Important lessons to learn about life. As Grandfather tells the young man about these lessons of life, he tells stories to illustrate his points. These are stories of great truths. As I heard Old Hawk teaching grandson, Jeremy, I pictured a young Hebrew grandchild sitting about the fire with the elder, learning the meaning of life from stories told about Creation, the Garden of Eden, Cain and Abel, **THE FLOOD** and **RAINBOW**, as well as others.

In this brief snippet of the story, we heard Janet speak the word “**COVENANT**” *seven times*. That’s a very important part of the story – in fact another way of speaking the terms “First Testament” and “New Testament” in our Bible is: “First Covenant” and “New Covenant.”

In this seven part sermon series that will carry us through Lent into Easter, we are going to focus on the Covenant between God and humans and (as we learn in today’s scripture) it is also a covenant with all of creation.

Today’s lesson involves a **RAINBOW**. And so, the Worship Committee thought that the **RAINBOW** would be a good vehicle for us to deal with the lessons of Lent. The little friend that many of us learned in elementary school to remember the colors of the **RAINBOW**, will also be our memory tool for the lessons of Lent 2015: **ROY G BIV**.

**ROY G BIV** – Red, Orange Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet.

These are all the colors of the **RAINBOW**. If you hold a glass prism up to light, it breaks them down into all the colors of **ROY G BIV**.

Now, are **RAINBOW**s merely the action of drops of water in the sky after a rain, like little prisms refracting the sun into this color?

THAT explanation is a correct one, but certainly one that lacks imagination and explanation of the nature of life. THAT EXPLANATION is certainly **NOT** the *tool of the storyteller* whose version of a **RAINBOW** gives us many more tools for encountering life.

In the scientist's version, the prism effect of water in the atmosphere after a rain storm would have always been around, and did not come into existence just after the flood: B O R I N G

This thing called COVENANT – which is so important to our faith – is similar, but also very different in key aspects – to CONTRACTS, of which we modern and post-modern people have great experience. A CONTRACT is negotiated between two parties of equal power, and is the result of a “meeting of minds” – the first semester law student is taught.

COVENANTS – these are not negotiated. God writes the terms. Period. There is not equality of the parties to the contract. God writes the terms. God enforces the contract. The human has the choice of participation.

So, in this COVENANT told about in the Story of the RAINBOW, God says that the RAINBOW is a tool for REMEMBRANCE.

**R** (the first letter of ROY G BIV) is the first letter of today's teaching: **REMEMBER**. (Next week's scripture will be about the second letter of ROY G BIV – “O”.)

**REMEMBER** – So people can remember the Flood and the Recovery? So people can remember the Covenant that God makes with the humans and with all of creation after the flood?

Well – NO. The story has a funny little twist here. It's **so God will remember**. I'm not making this stuff up: look at verses 16 & 17:

*<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.”*

Oh, that's funny, /the RAINBOW is like a string tied around God's finger?

- “Uh, oh! There's the RAINBOW,” God says. “Good thing I saw it; I was thinking about destroying the world in a flood today.” (That scenario has ironic significance with today's weather!)

- “Oh, wow. There’s the **RAINBOW!** That reminds me: I need to make sure that gravity works today, so that creation will continue. Glad I saw it and remembered.”

The first step of the **TWELVE STEP PROGRAM** is to recognize the existence of the **GREATER, the HIGHER, POWER.**

And the emphasis of today’s **RAINBOW** STORY is that **GOD**, the HIGHER POWER, **DOES REMEMBER.**

The **RAINBOW** teaches us that **GOD REMEMBERS.**

In fact, when you look throughout scripture, one of the most enduring (and endearing) qualities of God is **GOD’S REMEMBRANCE.**

The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus is the **GOD OF STEADFAST LOVE.** God always remembers.

- In the midst of **the world falling down around you**, it’s good to remember that **GOD REMEMBERS YOU, AND LOVES YOU, AND WANTS THE BEST FOR YOU**, even though it may not feel like it at the time.
- In the **midst of shame from our doing things that were incredibly stupid**, it’s good to remember that **God remembers your Baptismal name: Beloved Child of God’s, Precious and Beautiful to Behold** – even if you have a hard time remembering that.
- In the midst of **circumstances where you have a hard time remembering that life is meant to also be good**, it’s good to be able to hold onto the fact that **GOD REMEMBERS** Jesus said **He came to give us not only life eternal, but also life abundant.**

**OUR HIGHER POWER REMEMBERS.** And our knowledge of God’s faithfulness in remembering is a good thing for us to hold onto, when it seems like everything else is falling away.

- God will not forget to save.

- God will not forget to love.
- God will not forget to empower us to do whatever God calls us to doing.
- God will not forget ... even when ... whatever ...

**Q: What can WE do to remember?**

**A:** One suggestion: **KEEP THE SABBATH.**

The rabbi came into town and saw every one running, running, running. **“For what? For what are you running?”** he asked. **“To make a living,”** they said. The rabbi responded: **“Why do you assume a living is in front of you? Maybe it is behind you and you need to stop and let it catch you. This is purpose of Shabbat - to celebrate the important but non-urgent things in your life.”**

God commanded us, and we ought do it -- to take Sabbath, to slow down, to let the important but non-urgent things in life catch up to you ... things like REMEMBERing.

All throughout the Bible, the lesson of the **RAINBOW** is repeated: our God remembers. There is, curiously, **one example of where God forgets.** The prophet Micah tells of how one component of God’s steadfastness is also the characteristic of **divine amnesia** for one thing:

**18 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity  
and passing over transgression  
for the remnant of his inheritance?  
He does not retain his anger forever,  
because he delights in steadfast love.**  
**19 He will again have compassion on us;  
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.  
You will cast all our sins  
into the depths of the sea.**

Ironically, it seems that so many people are hung up on God’s remembering their sins, and offering up punishment. And people-particularly people in the church- spend a lot of time time worried about whether or not they are saved from their sins. But here, Micah tells us that God’s **STEADFAST LOVE – GOD’S INHERENT POWER OF**

REMEMBERING also has amnesia for one thing – our sins in the midst of God’s forgiveness, which are thrown away into the very depths of the sea.

If God can forget, then we need to remember that it’s also possible for us to forget and to let go of them – to cast them into the depths of the sea.

God has a covenant for us. We don’t get to negotiate. It’s a take it or leave it. HOWEVER, when we accept it, then we are blessed to know that:

**God WILL REMEMBER to love us,**

**God WILL REMEMBER to care for us,**

**God WILL REMEMBER to empower us,**

and

**God WILL REMEMBER to forgive and forget all our sins.**

Look at the RAINBOW. If you want to remember only the prism effects of raindrops on the light that shines through them, then you get an A in science and an INCOMPLETE in the understanding of the importance of GOD’S COVENANT in your life.

Look at the RAINBOW, and REMEMBER: God remembers. God loves. God empowers. God wants the very best for you. God can ALWAYS be trusted.

The first letter of ROY G BIV reminds us that **GOD REMEMBERS.**

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

<sup>1</sup> By Joseph M. Marshall, III