

## AFTER THE FLOOD: A RAINBOW PROMISE

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church on Girl Scout Sunday, March 9, 2003 which is also the First Sunday in Lent.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Nearly everybody knows the story of the flood. Let's see how familiar you are with it. How many of each kind of animal did Moses take with him into the Ark? None! It was *Noah* who took the animals in the Ark. For those who may not be familiar with the story of the flood let me retell the story.

Before the Great Flood people became very nasty and refused to do *anything* God wanted them to do. God was sorry he created the world. He decided to start all over with a new creation. God decided to send a Great Flood to cleanse the world. But God loves people even when they're nasty and didn't want any to drown. So God told Noah to build a boat big enough for everybody and Noah obeyed. Noah *also* warned people about the coming flood and urged everybody to come into the boat. But nobody boarded except Noah's family. The rain continued forty days and nights – the same amount of time Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. When the rain stopped and the waters subsided the boat rested on dry ground and everybody got out. Noah immediately built an altar and worshiped God. Then God promised he would never allow a flood to destroy the earth again and he placed a rainbow in the sky to remind us *and him* of the promise. To this day, when we see a rainbow we remember God's promises.

I want you to notice one thing about God's Rainbow Promise. Notice how all inclusive it is. God's Rainbow Promise is to all. It's to all people - Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Melanesian Frog worshipers, atheists and agnostics. "Tough kids, sissy kids, kids who climb on rocks. Short kids, tall kids, even kids with chicken pox." The colors of the rainbow remind us of God's promise to people of all *colors* and *religions* and *cultures*. God's Rainbow Promise is *also* to all nature - to sparrows, kangaroos, elephants, gnats and snakes – every created thing. I see all the colors of the rainbow in nature – green grass, yellow corn, red apples, purple mountains majesty, blue skies. God has made a promise to all people and all nature never to destroy the earth again with a flood and rainbows remind us and God of that promise.

God's all-inclusive Rainbow Promise reminds me of two Girls Scouts promises. First, *Girls Scouts promise to understand, respect, and appreciate the cultures, races and religions of all people*. Just as a rainbow is made up of many colors, our world is made up of people of many colors. Girls Scouts promise to accept and

welcome people of all colors in all their diversity and work for peace and understanding. Secondly, just as God made a promise to preserve the earth and all living things *Girl Scouts promise to care for the earth*. I came across a *Girl Scout Care For The Earth Pledge*. In that pledge a Girl Scout promises to "make a difference by using resources wisely and protecting and improving the world around me. I am a caretaker of this planet."

When Girl Scouts plant trees, take *short* showers, recycle paper, keep the thermostat turned down in cold weather you're being friendly to the environment. You're expressing care for the earth that God loves. Just as God has made a promise to save the world from another flood – Girl Scouts make a promise to care for the earth.

A Rainbow reminds us of God's all-inclusive promise never to destroy the earth with another flood. A rainbow also reminds me of a bridge. Girl Scouts have a Rainbow Bridge patch they wear when they cross the bridge from one level of scouting to another. God's Rainbow Bridge is Jesus. Jesus is like a bridge that connects all people to God. God comes to us over the bridge of Jesus and we come to God over the bridge of Jesus. Jesus has bridged the chasm separating us from God. Jesus is our Rainbow Bridge.

In and through Jesus God has given us a far greater promise than the Rainbow promise. In Jesus Christ God promises to save the world – *not simply preserve it from destruction but to save it and turn it into a paradise*. The sign of God's promise to save the world is the Bread and Wine of Holy Communion. The Bread and Wine, as well as the Rainbow, point to God's promise to save the entire world through what Jesus has done for us by dying and rising. The death of Jesus reminds us that there's no price God is unwilling to pay in order for us to enjoy God's presence forever.

Jesus is present this morning to enable us to have communion with God and one another. He is our Rainbow Bridge to God. When you come to take the Bread and Cup remember Jesus Christ who died that we might live. Come to Christ this morning as he offers himself to us in the Bread and Wine. Trust in Jesus for cleansing and renewal. Even one who doubts or whose trust is wavering may come to the Table in order to be assured of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Faithful God, you placed the rainbow in the skies as the sign of your covenant with all living things. May we who are saved through water and the Spirit, worthily offer to you our sacrifice of thanksgiving. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.