

‘Twas the day after Valentine’s and on all of the shelves,
Were the leftover truffles (no doubt meant for santa’s elves!)
the roses and hearts bought by true-loving gents
had now become pointless, worth only 50%.
But what of the friendships that yesterday glowed
In the winsome delight that these tokens bestowed?
Will their value increase in inverse proportion
To the rose petals wilted and chocolates eaten?
Or will love fade and by disinterest be cheapened?
Let us remember, from this day forward
That love is a gift – and it comes from the Lord.

...

“Covenants of Love” is the theme for this Lenten season. Each week, we will hear the Bible story of a particular covenant that God makes.

But Covenant is not a common word for us.

We are familiar with some of its poor relations – contract, treaty, pledge, pact, agreement

These are promises two parties make to guarantee something else .

If I do this and you do that, then what we both want will happen.

A covenant is similar, but with two important differences:

1. God is the initiator

2. God's relationship with humanity is central

Most of us know the story of Noah and the ark.

But in case you've forgotten, it goes like this:

In the generations after Adam and Eve, sin and evil multiplied and became intolerable to God.

No amount of generous overlooking or mercy made things better.

A clean sweep was needed – a do-over for creation.

but instead of draining the swamp, God flooded it.

God did not start the do-over from scratch, either.

God chose Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives to be saved. They built the ark – a huge boat.

Then God saved the rest of creation by taking the animals on board, a male and female of each species..

Then it rained for a very long time – until the whole earth was covered with water and the ark was floating above the earth.

When the waters finally went down and the ark settled back on the earth, the new creation was populated with the creatures that had been saved.

Now what do you suppose was the first thing Noah did after the ark was emptied out?

Muck out the stalls?

Make love to Mrs Noah?

Throw a party?

Go shopping?

probably all of those things happened at some point, but they were not the first thing.

The first thing Noah did

– and this is important to today’s covenant story

– was to worship God – to make a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God.

He built an altar in order to worship the Lord God who had saved him and his family and the creation.

And when the Lord received Noah’s worship, the Lord was very pleased and said to himself:

“I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things. ²² As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.” Gen 8:21-22

That was God’s promise to himself.

It became a covenant when he shared it with Noah.

A covenant is God’s Word of promise made to establish and maintain a loving relationship with his people.

A covenant is by nature an act of God’s love.

Why did God decide “never again” to completely flooding the earth?

Because to do so would undermine his relationship of loving salvation with Noah – and by extension – with all people.

The Lord does not want a reputation of being punitive, but rather of being loving.

Total annihilation is not an option for God. It is against God’s very nature.

Sure, God must discipline his people, just as a loving parent disciplines an erring child.

But this covenant ensures that such discipline will always be measured and delimited.

Growing up, there were times I needed a good spanking.

My mother would always say as she put me over her knee

– This hurts me more than it hurts you.

Her discipline did not undermine her love for me – or mine for her.

God’s covenant with Noah and all creation was a promise of steadfast love.

And this covenant is accompanied by a sign – the rainbow.

When the sun comes out and shines onto the wet clouds, the water refracts the light into the bow of color that is always marvelous to behold.

Yes, we can explain the rainbow scientifically,

but that does not detract from its very presence being a sign of God’s faithfulness.

A covenant is initiated by God.

And, it is upheld by God – often one-sidedly.

What did Noah have to do to be worthy of this act of love on God's part?

Absolutely nothing.

What did Noah do in response to having experienced God's loving salvation?

He worshiped – gave thanks – made an offering from what God had provided.

God loved Noah – and Noah responded in love.

Noah received the covenant in faith

– and **lived in the promise it conveyed.**

Let's go a bit deeper.

Let's imagine God made no such promise.

Let's imagine, the rain stopped and the waters receded, and the ark emptied out on dry land **without a word from God.**

How might Noah have responded then?

Fear? Always checking the weather reports to see if the rain would return and this time he might be lost.

Hopelessness? Wondering why bother with living, if it can all end suddenly?

Desperation? What am I supposed to do now?!

But God *did* have a word for Noah – a covenant promise of life.

A command to be fruitful and multiply

A bow of color to remind us all that his word is true and can be trusted.

So Noah lived in faith and hope and love – for God and for his wife and family.

Not perfectly – he did get drunk and into a bit of trouble.

But obediently – he planted a vineyard, he and his vineyard were fruitful and multiplied.

He lived 350 more years and died when he was 950.

However you want to interpret those numbers, Noah lived a long time after the flood and died an old man.

God's covenant of love for humanity and all creation gives us reason to live in faith and hope, too.

We have many reasons to worship the Lord and make a sacrifice of thanksgiving for our salvation.

For by the cross of Jesus, we are on the ark of salvation.

Every breath we take is a sign of God's faithfulness to his covenant never to destroy the earth with water and never to let human wickedness have the last word.

As it says in Romans 8: 31-39

³⁸ ... I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for

today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.

Noah planted a vineyard to bear fruit and sustain life.

What do we do with our life in Christ?

How do we bear the fruit of confidence in God’s promises?

- Worship the Lord with sacrifices of thanksgiving?
- Stop worrying about the future?
- Invest in activities that give life?

With Noah and his family, we may dare to live hopefully, obediently, and faithfully – knowing that God never goes back on his Word.

- And God never sells his love off cheap like post-holiday candy;
- His love does not wilt like roses;
- His covenants do not expire.

God loves us too much.

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