

**Sermon for Sunday Feb 18 – First Sunday in Lent (year b)  
Genesis 9:8-17 – Rainbow**

**Prayer:** God of ancient story and present moment may the words I offer in reflection, be acceptable to you and echo your wisdom in our time. Amen

In Indiana along the Wabash River there's an Old Town that has been preserved for tourists, it is called New Harmony. New Harmony was founded in 1825 by a fellow named Robert Owens and what Robert Owens was wanting to do was create the perfect society. He wanted this new town to be a place of happiness, innovation, and prosperity. This was going to happen through the use of education, science, cutting edge technology, and communal living. So, he put out a request for people from all over to come and join him in this utopian experiment. All kinds of people came, scientists came, engineers came, people with cutting edge technology came and together they did some remarkable things. In this town called New Harmony they created a system of free public education for men and women - way ahead of its time for 1825. They were the first town in the United States to have a free Public Library. Yet despite these innovations, despite the really wonderful things that they were trying to do, within two years New Harmony started falling apart. Within four years they had disbanded entirely. What went wrong? **People!**

The reason why New Harmony failed was because it was made-up of people, human beings. Grouchy people, lazy people, selfish people, arrogant people, happy people, ambitious people, humble people, fun people – regular people. People like you and me.

New Harmony was not humanities only attempt at a utopia. Throughout the world - people have tried to create the ideal community, we try again and again and again and every single time it fails. And it seems to fail for the same reason - because there are all made up of people. Clearly, we human beings are a challenging bunch. We're not perfect – and we will probably never be perfect, but what is amazing to me is that our God seems to understand this about us.

At least this is what the Bible seems to tell us.

The Bible is filled with people, being people and God doing what needs to be done to be in relationship with them. Over and over again, people disappoint, mess up, hurt each other, get distracted – we turn away from what is good and what is right. And God seems to move into the mess that we have made and say; “I love you - lets give this another try.”

“I will not abandon you – I promise – lets take the next step together.”

This seems to me to be the message found in our Hebrew bible reading this morning.

There is lots of scholarship about where this story came from, some say the story of Noah and the Ark was written by Moses, more modern scholars think, given the language - the story was most likely written long after Mose's death. The story was perhaps written and then added to other texts to assure Israels place on the land – a sort of resume to convince others of their legitimate place as a grand nation. I know there is so much more to be said about the historical nature of this story and I am sure my Hebrew Bible Professor (David Jobling) would be most disappointed in me for this

brief explanation. But I just want us to be reminded that the writer was not writing about a historical event.

I imagine the writer, commissioned to write this back story, for the people of Israel to be very much like the creative writer and poet Mary Oliver – someone who looked at the world and found hope and beauty and the hand of God at work.

I love Mary's Poem "In the Storm"

*"Some black ducks were struggling up on the shore.*

*It was snowing hard, from the east, and the sea was in disorder. Then some Sandlings, 5 inches long with beaks like wire, flew in, snowflakes on their backs, and settled in a row behind the ducks ---- whose backs were also covered with snow ----- so close they were all but touching, they were all but under the roof of the ducks tails, so the wind, pretty much, blew over them.*

*They stayed that way, motionless, for maybe an hour, then the Sandlings, each a handful of feathers, shifted, and were blown away --- out over the water which was still raging. But, somehow, they came back and again the ducks, like a feathered hedge, let them crouch there, and live.*

*If someone you don't know told you this, as I am telling you this, would you believe it? Belief isn't always easy. But this much I have learned---if not enough else---- to live with my eyes open.*

*I know what everyone wants is a miracle. This wasn't a miracle. Unless, of course, kindness---as now and again some rare person has suggested---it is a miracle. As surely it is."*  
(from Thirst by Mary Oliver pg. 62-64, 2006)

To be able to see the hand of God - a miracle - in the protective act of ducks like Mary Oliver did is amazing.

Like Mary I imagine the writer of the story of Noah and the Ark sitting on the porch, in their most creative spot, with their eyes wide open. Sitting and watching the last raindrops fall after what seemed like a forever rain storm with pen in hand. And suddenly in the sky a fracture of sunlight breaking through the cloud and there – perfectly arched in the sky a rainbow.

I imagine the writer seeing more in that bow of light than most of us can see. And I imagine the writer putting pen to paper and crafting the amazing story of Noah and the Ark:

A story of horrific destruction and violence, as the world, its creatures and people are washed away.

A story of deliverance of one good and rather handy family. A family who could build a crazy big boat in the middle of the desert and who seemed also to possess zookeeper wisdom even without the internet.

A story of promise – of God's love and mercy and abiding presence.

This morning, we heard the end of the story and the Bible's familiar wisdom. God loves all of creation, even its people and God wants to be with the people. God has placed this beautiful light in the sky so that God can remember creations beauty: the beauty of the birds and the beasts and the creepy crawly things and the people – even the people. The beautiful rainbow of colour is for God. So that God will remember to love.

And this bow of colour can also be seen by all living things so that we too might remember that we are loved and are with God always.

I like that God is not the only one who can see the rainbow.

Isn't it wonderful that we can see it too?

I am convinced that the rainbow - not only reminds us that we are God's beloved people - but that we have a choice.

We are reminded that we are called not to destroy but to love.

Called to love all the other imperfect people and all of creation and that when we remember to do that, the world is brighter, and we get a little closer to New Harmony.

I like how Mya Angelou says it: Let us hear her wisdom together.

## VIDEO

Rev. Debra Berg