

# Sermon Text for July 11, 2021

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *John 8:31-32, Genesis 9:8-17* *“The story of Noah and the ark”*

I watched a movie the other night, probably a few weeks ago. It was a very, very powerful movie, it had a lot of bad language, so I have to hesitate to recommend it. It certainly is not a family movie, but one that could be incredibly impactful. It was called Judas and the Black Messiah, it was a story of Fred Hampton and the creation of the Rainbow Coalition in the 60's, really, really powerful. I did not know about the rainbow coalition and what it represented until that movie, the only rainbow coalition that I knew was in the 80's, a time I could remember and Jesse Jackson and the rainbow coalition.

It got me thinking how many groups or organizations use the rainbow as their logo, as their symbol and what does it mean in those different groups? I did a little research and back in 1525 Thomas Muntzer, the pre-reformation reformer used the rainbow as his symbol as he gathered what he called the Eternal Covenant of God soldiers. It didn't get very far. In the 60's the rainbow was used as a symbol by those looking to bring an end to the nuclear age. In the 1990's South Africa was described by the bishop Desmond Tutu as the rainbow nation. Today the LGBTQ+ movement uses a sort of rainbow as an image and logo. It has led Emma Wilkinson to ask the question: Who owns the colors of the rainbow?

In our Scripture reading for today we get an answer to that question, and like any good children's sermon the answer is God. We see today that God put his bow in the sky with a very specific meaning and purpose. The rainbow in each of these movements represents something different from what God intended, although there can be some overlap. The story of Noah and the ark is really about the rainbow and the truth that sets us free found within the covenant that is seen within the sign of the rainbow. This truth, this covenant reverberates through all of us in the person of Jesus. Let's read.

### **READ**

I said on Thursday evening at our Bible Study, I was so please that over 20 of you joined us, it is the last one now for a few weeks, but I shared with you that I am giddy about this Sunday. That is a much different approach than probably what you experienced or what you thought you saw last week when Simeon was here, especially at the end of the first service. You cannot control the Holy Spirit, it blows where it will, and when the church finds itself with more

people than what we have had so far, with communion, and a sermon on friendship, well, I didn't have a chance. That's almost not fair. But I am giddy this week, there is so much to which we can look forward. We have new members joining, a couple of baptisms, I'm getting ready to head off for study leave and vacation. Also, this first Scripture in John is my favorite Scripture in the entire Bible. Especially that part which states: You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

Pilate asked Jesus at the end of his life: What is truth? Can't you hear Pilate today asking that same question in the face of what is called the big lie, in the face of a church taken hostage by a movement that seeks to subvert truth. Jesus gave a simple answer in the Gospel of John, chapter 14, he states I am the way, the truth and the life. So we have to ask the question, if Jesus is the truth, how do we know truth? Our first Scripture answers that question, and we will see how that ties into our story of Noah and the ark.

Jesus has earlier in this chapter been confronted by the religious leaders who wanted to stone and adulterous woman. He teaches and we read in vs.30 that many come to believe in him. He then addresses, we read in vs.31, those who had just come to believe in him. This is a new community. This is the church that he is addressing. He isn't talking to those who did not know him or believe in him, he is addressing those who do believe in him and want to follow him and be his disciples. He tells them: "If you continue in my word" two things will happen. 1) you will become my disciples, and 2) you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Jesus tells us simply that reading God's Word gives you an insight into life and truth and insight into daily living in the midst of a very, very confusing time. We find our freedom through a relationship with God. What that relationship looks like, the foundation of that relationship that Jesus describes, actually finds its foundation and its birth in our first story, which is that of Noah and the ark. Let's look at that story.

If you noticed we actually never really saw the ark at all in our reading. Instead of Noah and the ark this story should be called, at least the part that we read, Noah and the rainbow. We begin our verses by God calling the family of Noah together. This isn't just for Noah, but for all of his sons since what is going to be said is going to have an impact on them and all of those who come after them, as vs. 9 states, the descendants that come after them, and we are included in that number by the way.

Gather round family, God tells them. You have just been through chaos, you have just experience the complete destruction of the world, and now I am going to explain what I am going to do. I am going to promise you, listen to me now, that I will never do this again. In

vs.11 we find that promise of the covenant. Some interpret it in a Hamiltonian fashion that this means that God will never destroy the earth again, some interpret it in a Jeffersonian fashion that this means that God will never destroy the earth again with a flood. I take the Hamiltonian stance that God promises us, his covenant with us, is that he will never destroy us again.

We then see that God places a sign in the sky for the purpose of what? Look at vs.15 and vs.16, for the purpose of remembering. But who needs to remember this deal, this promise, this covenant? In Sunday School we are normally taught that the rainbow is a reminder to us. No, this states that this rainbow is a reminder to God. We are going to turn our back on God, we will be unfaithful, but the rainbow will remind God that no matter how much we drive him crazy, no matter how sinful we will be, he will not destroy us. The next time we are unfaithful God will remember.

But it actually gets better. Not only will God no longer destroy humanity, but God will actually eventually send his only begotten son to die at the hands of humanity. Not even this will take God over the edge. In fact, this will provide life, even eternal life, to all of humanity. The last iteration of this covenant is found in Jesus.

What we find here is that God makes an irreversible commitment that the post-flood, post-chaos situation is decisively different. One of you came into my office this week and we agreed that the post-pandemic is going to be different from the pre-pandemic. I keep saying normal, but it is going to be different, we better know that. But here, in this post destruction in Scripture, what has changed is not people. We are still the same. Noah and his sons continue on in their sin as we do. What changes in this Bible story, with this covenant that the bow serves as a reminder, is that God has changed. He has said, never again.

What has changed is God moving from punishing the guilty to unqualified grace. The one to one connection of guilt and punishment is broken. The bow shows us that God is no longer in pursuit of the enemy because the enemy has been vanquished. You know creation ends with God resting, and this recreation ends with God resting his weapon, his bow, in the sky. The God who rules over us has turned toward us in a new way.

Today we have an opportunity to let the world know how differently God interacts with us, no longer adversary but rather Savior. We see that God chooses to remember grace. As we baptize and bring in new members we have to remember the words of I Peter 3:18-21 that remind us that baptism for all of us like coming out of the waters of the flood and into a new life. We need that new life as we come out of the chaos of the pandemic and into a new life that we cannot predict or clearly understand, except we know for certain that we will not be walking

alone in this future, but rather Jesus our Savior will be walking with us as we are protected by the waters of baptism.

It is clear in this Scripture that chaos does not have the last word. Do you hear me church? The last Word is retained by the one who stands outside of and presides over the flood. And his last word is, I will remember my covenant. Noah embodies a newness in human history just like we all do as we come out of the pandemic. Amen.