

Somewhere Over the Rainbow

Genesis 9:8-17

Thinking of rainbows always makes me think of the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. As a child I would watch it every year when it was on TV. In my early days I viewed it in black and white. Later, when my folks could afford the luxury of a color TV, the movie was even more enjoyable. What a transformation when the Emerald City went from shades of gray to brilliant green!

In the movie, Judy Garland's character, Dorothy, laments that something better must exist "somewhere over the rainbow". Living with her aunt and uncle we can only assume she had been orphaned. The spinster lady down the road apparently had it in for her. Life was looking somewhat dismal on the prairie. This was before her adventures in the Land of Oz, where she meets Munchkins, a talking scarecrow, tin man, and lion. Not to mention the witch with the flying monkeys. All of that helped her to understand that the "somewhere over the rainbow" she longed for was the place she had been all along.

In today's Scripture reading, God establishes the very first rainbow. It is a natural phenomenon with supernatural meaning. As Noah and his family gazed at that first rainbow, they, too, may have been lamenting

“somewhere over the rainbow” just like Dorothy. Their somewhere over the rainbow would be the life they knew before all of Creation was covered in water. Their enemies, as well as their friends and neighbors, were now all gone. The flocks and herds they tended had been replaced by an eclectic collection of domestic, wild, and exotic animals.

Unlike Dorothy, they couldn't just click their heels together and chant “There's no place like home” to return to the place they had been. Home no longer existed. They were in a new land, their own version of Oz. And the wizard in this story was played by the Lord God, who wields true power unlike the hapless wizard in the movie.

Dorothy's Kansas was a place of loving family, county fairs, and long summer days, though she may not have been able to appreciate it at the time. The “Kansas” of Noah's time was a world that had become so corrupt that God decided to wipe the slate clean and start all over again. In the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy is swept away in an instant by a tornado to the magical Land of Oz. In Noah's story he spent years building an Ark in the middle of the dessert in a world that had never seen rain. And it wasn't a spinster on a bicycle that was heckling him but his neighbors sneering and pointing fingers at that crazy Noah building a boat in the middle of the dessert. That was until Noah and his family, and all the

animals they had gathered into that boat, were swept away in a flood of epic proportions.

In both the Wizard of Oz and the story of Noah, chaos engulfs the main characters and swirls them around, until they land on the other side of the storm. Chaos, as we know, is not just an ancient phenomenon. We know that chaos exists in the world today in the events shown on our evening news programs - terrorism, war, natural disasters, and the disparity of the allocation of resources among the haves and have nots of the world. In our own lives chaos arrives in the form of broken relationships, either by death, estrangement, or divorce. Illness in body and mind, addictions of all types, create chaos in our lives. Sadly, much of this we bring on ourselves, just as the people of Noah's time did in their day.

Today's Scripture is meant to bring hope to all of us who experience chaos in our lives. Even if the chaos is of our own making. The people of Noah's time had devolved into a life of violent chaos and God had to respond. God was sorry for what he had done by flooding the earth and chose to put a limit on himself in the future. Take note, because this is an important point, God limited *Himself* in his future dealings with his rebellious people. He made a covenant with Noah and his descendants that the world would never again see the chaos of a world-wide flood.

Even though God's people would continue to sin, even to today, the promise holds. To seal the covenant, God placed a bow in the sky. A bow, normally a symbol of war, became a symbol of peace. The unstrung bow, pointing skyward is no threat to those on earth. And I don't think it's by accident that the rainbow only appears after a storm.

God is saying to us that although we will turn away from Him and bring chaos on ourselves by not trusting in Him, He will not forsake us. He will be the calm during and after the storms, the chaos, we encounter in our lives. We can be assured of this when we see His bow in the clouds.

What is interesting about this covenant, which is an agreement between two people, is that God does not put any restrictions or demands on us. He has limited only Himself with this covenant. True, it was the sin of humanity that caused God to flood the earth, yet He only places limits on how he will respond to our shortcomings in the future. This covenant would be repeated with Abraham, King David, and eventually with Jesus, who with his blood has redeemed sinful mankind and reconciled us with God.

Through all our shortcomings, God promises to be patient and loving. Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love for all of us. He will no longer deal with us in anger but work within us to bring us back into the

fold, restored to a right relationship with Him. In this season of Lent, we are reminded of His final work of restoration offered to us when Jesus gave his life on the cross. We can be restored to our right relationship with God by accepting his risen Son as our Lord and Savior.

We all seek relief from the chaos of life. We seek restored relationships with family and friends. We seek the knowledge that God knows who we are and what we are going through and that he will be there to carry us through the chaos and restore peace in our lives. We have his assurance, a bow in the sky that says he forgives us and will never again deal with us according to our sins. This blessed assurance he gives us not only in the bow in the clouds, but through his Son, Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins, redeeming us, and restoring us to a right relationship with God.

Again, a covenant is between two people. We know what God's part in the covenant is. What is our part? I think Jane Anne Ferguson sums up our part in her commentary on these verses:

In the light of God's rainbow promise, the church can become a place where conflict is taken seriously and respectfully and not "swept under the rug." Methods of nonviolent conflict resolution and restorative justice can be explored for the health of the congregation, as well as in reaching out to a world of conflict and

violence. The church can become a community that seeks transparency in its corporate and individual relationships and clarity in its internal and external communication. The church can respond to God's call to be a place where "all the colors of the rainbow" were welcome and equal in God's sight, in terms of race, age, gender, and sexual orientation. The church can seek constructive dialogue with communities of other faiths or communities on the other side of denominational or doctrinal divides. Previously unimaginable partnerships may be formed, and reconciliation may blossom. The patience and forgiveness spilling forth from hearts broken open by God's love may paint the walls of the church, color its people, and emanate from its doors and windows into the world.

We are to do our part to address the chaos that exists in our world today. So many people are still waiting for their own "somewhere over the rainbow" to happen. Let's educate ourselves on the chaos that surrounds us and look for ways that we, as the Church, can bring healing and hope in the name of the God who set his bow in the clouds as a never-ending promise of his love and forgiveness.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, you have not destined us for wrath. You have set your bow in the clouds to remind us of your steadfast love and forgiveness. You have also sent us your Son, Jesus Christ, so that we might live with you in that place “somewhere over the rainbow” when our journey here is over. We praise you for your grace and mercy to us. We pray all these things with thanksgiving in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN

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