

# ***“Never Again”***

## ***Genesis 9:8-17 & Mark 1:9-15***

### ***March 1, 2009***

I think I may have told you about this incident before but is such a good one that it bears repeating. It happened in California and was reported under the title “Car-jacking foiled”. It seems that an elderly woman had been at a local mall doing some shopping. When she was leaving and got out to her car she saw that there were 4 men in the car. She dropped her shopping bags and pulled out her handgun. She began screaming at the top of her lungs telling them to get out of her car and that she knew how to use ‘this thing’ and she wasn’t afraid to do so. The men did not waste any time responding - without waiting for a second invitation they jumped out and ran for their lives. When they were well out of sight, the woman retrieved her shopping and got into the car. It was only when she tried to start the car and the key would not work that she began to notice that the car was a little different. Only then did she see that a few cars away was an identical car .... Her car. With nothing else to do she took her bags and went over to her car and drove to the nearest police station. When she tried to explain the situation to the sergeant at the desk he almost died laughing as he pointed down at the other end of the counter where there were 4 very pale men just finishing making a report of the mad elderly woman who hijacked their car at gun point. No charges were filed.

Crazy - huh? Luckily that incident ended well but it does reveal some of the craziness in our world. Sometimes it seems as though a person has seen so much that they just get feed up and they are not going to take it any longer. It is also really lucky that we live in such a great place that we never get feed up with one another. It is lucky that we live in such a peaceful, perfect place that we never get frustrated with one another ..... Right? Well - I watch the news and I sometimes wonder what God must feel as He looks down upon His creation. I suspect that He sees the madness of war between nations, the destruction and death at the hands of drug cartels, and the simple and everyday pain inflicted by one person on another between friends. And I can imagine that He sees so much of it that He must be filled with rage and want to give up on the whole business. But then I imagine Him looking down on His creation one more time and there, somewhere in the vast, beautiful world He sees a rainbow. And He remembers. And when He remembers, perhaps in low tones that rumble across the sky the words slip from His lips one more time ..... “Never again!”

I don’t know if you noticed those words in our first scripture reading today. Three times in those brief verses they are repeated. Never again ..... “never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth ..... Never again shall all flesh be cut off ..... Never again shall waters destroy all flesh!” Never again ..... That is the promise of a loving and compassionate God that speaks to us almost from the very beginning of the Old Testament. Long before the coming of the promised savior ..... Long before the Christmas or Easter story ..... Long, long before you and I were a part of a crazy

humanity, God spoke the promise - - - NEVER AGAIN!

As I have thought about this text, it has seemed to me that it may seem a bit inappropriate for the beginning of Lent. We should be talking about the story of Jesus and His sacrifice for us. That is really the story of this season. And yet, here in what happens to be the continuing 'dead of winter' on the first Sunday of Lent, we are talking about rainbows. We tell our Sunday School children this story from a very early age. We look up and marvel at rainbows every time we see them and perhaps even remember that God made the promise never to flood and destroy all of creation in that way again. But perhaps we should have been seeing the rainbow as a promise that was more extensive - a promise that goes to the very heart of God.

Think with me for a minute about that old, old and very familiar story from which this account of a rainbow comes. It is a story that we most often refer to as the story of Noah and the flood. Some time ago Bill Moyers hosted a television series for PBS several years ago called Genesis: A Living Conversation. When it came to discussing this event from the Genesis narrative a panel of guests was asked how they might entitle the story if they were to write a new article about the event. The first respondent gave what might be considered a typical headline ... "God destroys the World". But a second person on the panel came at the story from a totally different angle. His title was: "God Gives Humans A Second Chance".

The ancient Hebrews saw the rainbow as a warrior's bow. They looked at it as though it was God's weapon of war that had been 'hung up' - put away, never to be used again. A compassionate and loving God gave us and gives us another chance.

As we enter into Lent, ask yourself about the God that you have come to worship today. Who is this God who would send Jesus to be sacrificed on a cross so that we might have life - we, the human family that would turn so against someone that they would end up on a cross. Amazing - both man's inhumanity to man and God's willingness to give us another chance - - - both beyond the gates of death and in the midst of our earthly storms.

Rainbows are truly amazing. Have you ever thought about the fact that a rainbow is the only 'heavenly' phenomenon that touches the earth at both ends. It binds itself to the earth both at the beginning and at the end. And that incredibly beautiful arch is created from what remains of the storm that has past. As water droplets remain in the air - light passes through them and the white light refracted into the colors of the rainbow. We are seeing the light in new ways. And yet, seeing does not bring it any closer to being in our grasp. We may chase after it - but it will always be beyond our reach. The rainbow - a sign of promise - a sign of God.

This past Wednesday, around the world people gathered for the beginning of Lent and many came away from those worship experiences with ashes adorning their foreheads. Often those ashes were in the shape of a cross. It too is a curious sign that points us to a promise - points us to God. The ashes are a symbol of sorrow - sorrow over our human sinfulness. The ashes become a symbol of our repentance and desire to return to God. The cross too is a sign. It is a sign or symbol of death ..... and it is a sign or symbol of life. In the cross we see God. And the God that we see is as rich and beautiful as the rainbow. God is one who saved a family from the flood but saved all of His children from the power of sin and death. God gives us a second chance at life ... for all of eternity. Though He could take up the war bow God chooses to take up the cross

instead. This is a God who tears open the heavens, not to release flood waters but to speak to us of promises as we are reminded that we too are the Sons and daughters of God because He has lifted us out of the flood waters of baptism so that He could claim us as children of God.

And so God touches the earth with a rainbow of promises. God touches the earth in the waters of our Baptism. And God touches the earth from the cross to give life.

**AMEN**