

Who knows what this is? (outside piece of rainbow)

Now do you know? (tape next piece inside)

What about now? (tape third piece. Then finish rainbow.)

One of the stories from the Bible today tells us about rainbows. It's a very, very old story. Can anyone guess how old? It was first written down about eight hundred years before Jesus was born, but it was probably told hundreds of years before that. Even when Jesus was a boy it was an old, old story.

Who remembers what happens in the story? It starts with the story of Noah. God is unhappy with the people who live in the same neighborhood as Noah. In fact, he's not just unhappy – he's terribly angry. So what does he do? He tells Noah to build himself a great big giant ship called an ark. Now this is in a region which doesn't get much rain, so it seems pretty stupid to Noah's neighbors, and they really make fun of him. They think he's gone totally crazy. Then he starts bringing two of each kind of animal onto the ark, and they think he's even crazier – building this ship on dry land, with no place to put it in the water, and then loading it up with a male and a female of every sort of animal.

And then what happens? It begins to rain. And it rains. And it rains. Probably at first the people like it. It waters their gardens and they think it will help things grow. But it doesn't stop, and it doesn't stop and it doesn't stop. The water rises and rises and rises. Pretty soon it's up to the doors of their houses, then to the windows, then up to the roof. It's like Hurricane Katrina, only it's worse. The water comes over everything, and keeps rising and rising and rising until nothing is left – except for Noah and his family and the animals in their ark.

For months and months and months it keeps on like this. Noah has a dove he sends out to see if there's any land anywhere, but the dove comes back. No land. By now he's getting pretty desperate. The food and the stores are getting pretty low. If something doesn't happen soon, they'll all starve. Finally the dove comes back with a twig, an olive twig in its bill, and Noah knows that the flood is going down, that there's land somewhere and soon there'll be more land.

Finally the ark is on dry land. Noah builds an altar and he and his family offer sacrifices. God is happy, and he says in his heart that he will never “again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.” A little later he makes his formal covenant with them, his promise that nothing like the flood will ever happen again. It's then that he gives the rainbow as a sign of his covenant. He says that “I shall set my bow in the cloud – that's the rainbow - and it shall be for a token – a sign – of a covenant between me and the earth.” And that's just what he did. So that is the story, the very old story, the story that Jesus learned when he was a child – about how the rainbow came to be, and how God promised his people that he would love them.

So this is the story of the rainbow. It's a symbol of God's covenant with us, of his promise that never again will he destroy everything on earth. No matter how horrible things may be, he has made his promise to us.

Does this mean that bad things don't happen to us? No. They happen. Look at the gospel story for today. Jesus gets baptized by John in the river Jordan, and God is happy with him. But then what does the spirit do? It's not very nice. The spirit drives him out into the wilderness, where he is tempted by Satan for forty days. If you think bad things happen to you, what do you think Jesus endured? How do you think it felt to endure forty days of the devil's constant barrage trying to undermine him?

Bad things happen. Pain happens. Grief happens. Sorrow happens. But always we have the promise of God's covenant with Noah, the promise symbolized by the rainbow. "When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature." The world may be cruel and terrible and horrible, but always we know that God loves us and will look after us, and there is hope in this world or the next.

To me this is a Sunday when I think of the rainbow and of the hope for the future which it symbolizes. The Diocese of Milwaukee now has a policy that deacons should no longer stay in the same parish for ever and ever. It wants them to take sabbaticals and have breathing space and sometimes to see how other parishes work rather than returning to the one where they were. It especially wants them to move when a new priest comes, either before or after. When Fr. Bramlett left, I went in to Bishop Miller, and he asked me to stay until you had a new priest, and for a while after that, and I did so. Last week I met with him again, and it's now time for me to take my sabbatical. I'm not sure just what my last Sunday will be. It depends in part on when the grandchild who's due this month actually appears. At this point I don't know what'll be next for me, or where the Bishop will next choose to use me.

Parting from Trinity is very sad for me. There are people here whom I've known and liked for close to thirty years, and during the two years I've been here I've come to know and love almost all of you. The thought of saying good bye and breaking my formal ties with this church almost breaks my heart. I've loved being here. I've loved the ministries I've been able to perform, and I shall miss all of you greatly.

But, like you, I am a child of the rainbow. Parting is sorrow, but God has made his covenant with us, and the rainbow is our sign of hope. He is our God, and we are his people. In the words of Psalm 22, the psalm which Jesus quoted on the cross, "Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted and thou didst deliver them...they trusted in thee, and were not confounded." I don't know what my next chapter will be, but I put my trust in God that it can be a good one, one where I can love him and serve him in whatever way he calls me. One thing is certain – I carry with me many fond memories of this place, and they will be with me always.

As we walk our separate paths, I will pray for all of you also and for this church and God's blessing upon it, upon Fr. Lebron and the whole worshipping community. We are all of us children of the rainbow, children of the Lord who has promised us that whosoever believeth in him shall never perish but have eternal life." Let us all, you and me alike, go forth on our separate paths to love and serve our Lord, trusting that we shall ever be confounded.

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