

“We are a Rain (bow)”



Call to worship (from Psalm 25)

God leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble God's way.
All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep God's covenant.

Hymn. STF20 – Be still for the presence of the Lord

Watch on YouTube : <https://youtu.be/XOCfPjLOvC4?feature=shared>

Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around

Prayers - We'll walk with you

God called you, Jesus, into Jordan's deep
To hear the voice that named you 'Precious child',
The one to pioneer a Way of Love:
We'll walk with you.

The Spirit led you into emptiness,
To feel the lure of what you might possess.
You turned away resolved to live for God:
We'll walk with you.

You went into your town to tell the truth:
In you the greatest promise is fulfilled
That all will share the freedom of God's love.
We'll walk with you.

Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place

David J. Evans © 1986 Thankyou Music

You loved and longed and hurt and gave your all,
Our God alive within the web of life,
And all the earth to you was holy ground:
We'll walk with you.

Your way extends as far as we can see
Into creation groaning to be free.
Still powers reign: how can we find the strength?
We'll walk with you.

O, make our hearts burn in us on the road,
Your love propel us into every place,
And on towards the kingdom's morning glow:
We'll walk with you.

Words: Andrew Herbert

Reading Genesis 9:8-15

One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.' 'But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and humans are honored, to hold sway over the trees?' 'Next, the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come and be our king.' 'But the fig tree replied, 'Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?' 'Then the trees said to the vine, 'Come and be our king.' 'But the vine answered, 'Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and humans, to hold sway over the trees?' 'Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, 'Come and be our king.' 'The thornbush said to the trees, 'If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!'

Hymn STF18 – Be still and know

Watch on YouTube https://youtu.be/AyDr9-Mpc_s?feature=shared

Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am God

In you, O Lord, I put my trust
In you, O Lord, I put my trust
In you, O Lord, I put my trust

I am the Lord who saves and heals
I am the Lord who saves and heals
I am the Lord who saves and heals

Anon Arr. Roland T. Fudge(1947)
Music © Roland T. Fudge

Reflection: 'We are a Rain (bow)'

Good morning and welcome to this morning's worship. My name Abe and once again, it is a pleasure to lead worship. Today, I've chosen to focus on our Old Testament reading, Genesis 9:8–17 in which describes how God, in the aftermath of the flood, blesses and makes a covenant - an agreement with Noah. The theme for today is 'we are a rainbow'.

In the passage, Noah and his family who, for some mysterious and unstated reasons, manages to survive the divine onslaught. In describing God's offer of a new covenant, this episode functions as a tying up of a conclusion to the flood narrative. As such, this narrative depicts God reconciling and making up with a world, which God, himself mysteriously, tried to destroy in the preceding chapters of Genesis.

Viewed in this light of reconciliation and God making up to the world, this account raises questions about reconciliation and forgiveness. What does real reconciliation and forgiveness look like? Are there acts that are unforgivable or so horrible that reconciliation and forgiveness are impossible? Moreover, what might appropriate recompense entail? For after all, God, in this story, has nearly killed everything and everyone in the world. As such, is God's promise not to do it again enough, or should God do or promise more? Hmmm!

The problematic portrayal of God in the passage opens up space to discuss and think about issues of the unfairness of the universe in which people, whether good or bad, are victimized or rescued at random. After all, though Genesis 6:9 states that Noah was righteous and good, there is no clear explanation as to why Noah, above everyone else (babies, animals, and plants, for example), was so good that he was saved while others died. How do we live responsibly in such an unfair world, one in which the difference between Noah and those killed in the flood is determined by whim and the luck of birth?

This problematic portrayal also intersects with questions about power and suffering. How do you make someone who has tremendous power behave ethically if they choose not to? In the case of the flood, the question about unchecked power overlaps easily with concerns about environmental degradation. The flood, according to the biblical text, insofar as it leads to the deaths of nearly all the animals and, though unmentioned, plant life, can be considered an environmental disaster. What happens when powerful forces or companies and

political leaders in our modern world use their power to wreak havoc on the environment and, by extension, people's lives? What do we do with autocratic and powerful forces that use their power to destroy places and cause suffering?

We're now on to Conference of Parties (COP28) to seek redress for vulnerable developing countries bearing the consequences for the lifestyles of richer nations associated with effects of climate change. The conference gets bigger, COP28 in Dubai is boasted as the largest with of kind, with some 150 Heads of States and government amongst the 85,000 delegates. But are countries keeping to promise through the 'Loss and Damage Fund?'

As the conclusion to a story of God wiping out almost all life and right before Noah curses his innocent grandson, we find in Genesis 9:8-17, God's eternal covenant with all creatures. It is a beautiful covenant in which God unconditionally promises to withhold divine destruction, and God sets a sign - a (rain)bow in the sky to assure humanity that we need not fear another cataclysm like that which is depicted in Genesis 6-8.

This is a much-loved passage by adults and one that we share with children from a very early age. But if we are not careful, we'll be prone to treating the rainbow as a happy ending to the flood while paying no attention to a horrible and divinely orchestrated genocide inscribed in the story of the flood. It is only a small step from that to becoming desensitised to the genocide and massive disasters of our world today.

The ecological implications of the flood story are significant. We receive God's promise that God will never again destroy the earth by flood, yet human sin seems bent on the ruin of creation. As climate change warms the earth and melts the ice caps, the prospect of a flooded earth looms larger every day. Genesis 9 reminds us that God is in relationship not just with humanity, but with "all flesh"; our living on the earth is bound up with the flourishing of all creation. God's eternal words to Noah and his sons in Genesis 9:9-10 are reasonably translated: "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you." At one level the story is also about the human need for divine reassurance.

God's commitment is never again to destroy the earth. The rainbow is a visual reminder of God's faithfulness, no matter how terrible, how destructive the storms. And at this point in our human history when storms are worsening because of what we have wreaked on this planet, that promise is comforting. Some may say that God's promise means it doesn't matter what we do or don't do. But the covenant is between God and all of us. Biblical covenants are based on binding legal agreements. The covenant to care for the earth is as binding on us as it is on God. Perhaps we and all Conference of Parties, whatever the number reached, need to think of the rainbow as a sign of our commitment to the earth and the wellbeing of all her creatures - all life on, above, and below the surface the earth, and in the air and in her waters.

The rainbow bears more significance in our world today; it represents the beauty and God-given goodness of the full spectrum of creation. In as much as the biblical text is concerned with the wellbeing of "every living creature" and "all flesh," no one is excluded.

And so, as the Lenten season calls us to repentance, the story of the flood provides a call to all of us, to repentance from our corporate sins of environmental and human degradation, as well as a call to action for ecological justice.

Prayers of Intercessions based on a hymn of affirmation

We're the light of all the world, we are a city on a hill, We're a candle on a stand proclaiming light,
We will not hide our lamp beneath a bushel any more, We will shine a ray of hope that's burning bright.

We are a rainbow, sign of covenant and peace, For the flood of tears will finally cease to be,
Come shine your rainbow, splash your hues across the sky, Paint the world in colours proud and bold and free.

We're a coat of many colours, sewn from many different threads, Covering all in warmth, in welcome and in grace,
God said "Let there be light", created every varied shade, In the rainbow each of us can find a place.

We are hope to still believe in tomorrow's better day, We are peace in a world that's torn apart,
We are joy that will last in all the struggles that we face, We are love that blooms and grows in every heart.

When we face the storms of life, we will never be alone, For our God will be with us on the way,
Hand in hand, side by side, we won't be frightened any more, As the mourning night of tears breaks into day.

Words and Music © 2017, 2022 David Kai

Final Hymn STF404 God's Spirit is in my heart

Watch on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/L-ibXHqsUTw?feature=shared>

God's Spirit is in my heart
He has called me and set me apart
This is what I have to do
What I have to do

He sent me to give the Good News to the poor
Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more
Tell blind people that they can see
And set the downtrodden free
And go tell everyone
The news that the Kingdom of God has come
And go tell everyone
The news that God's Kingdom has come

Just as the Father sent me
So I'm sending you out to be
My witness throughout the world
The whole of the world

Don't carry a load in your pack
You don't need two shirts on your back
A workman can earn his own keep
Can earn his own keep

Don't worry what you have to say
Don't worry because on that day
God's Spirit will speak in your heart
Will speak in your heart

Blessing

God called you, Jesus, into Jordan's deep To hear the voice that named you 'Precious child',
The one to pioneer a Way of Love: We'll walk with you. And the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you now and always, Amen.

Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

This service contains sources from: Singing the Faith Plus, The Church of Scotland, Joy and Ruth Everingham Music & Working Preacher.