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FMC Reedley sermon  
Genesis 9:8-17  
2-21-2021

## Regretting and Remembering

Welcome at last to Lent. Honestly, I feel like we have been here at lent for the past year. We have given up being together here in the flesh in order to serve God's mission of preserving life. But now is time for us to celebrate our work and sacrifice. We've all kept this ship sailing toward Christ and I am thankful for each and every one of you for staying here amidst this storm. And speaking of shipping, I have a fun history fact to share before I begin. Lent lasts for forty days in commemoration of the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert. In the fourteenth century, during the black death, ships arriving in Venice needed to wait in the harbor for 40 days before landing, they called it a quaranta giorni, which is where we receive the English word quarantine. So in a poetic sense, Lent is a quarantine, where we wait in the safe harbor before we can enter the glory that is Easter.

Prayer: Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be pleasing to you, our rock, and our salvation. Amen.

Today's sermon begins with the flood.

The Flood story is about regret and remembering. During the days of Noah, God regretting creating such a violent humanity, God regretted that humanity was ruining all of creation with its violence. And so, I imagine with tears in God's eyes, God sent the flood in the name of peace. This is a hard story. It is hard because we modern humans think of natural disasters as exclusively evil events. But, what if

we thought of the flood story as a way that the Ancient Israelites described the way that things are, not focusing on the flood, but on the resulting creative order that God sets up after the Flood. Let us focus on God remembering the rainbow, the divine bow that God places in the sky so that God cannot use it to destroy the earth again.

Have you ever regretted something in your life? I know that I have. I have wanted to be a vegetarian since I was a child. And during my teenage years, I made promises with myself that I would be one, but I would keep failing and eating chicken or fish. Even in my adulthood, I ate meat while I was in Peru in order to be hospitable. I regretted my failures, both caused by my individual choice and societal pressure. It does not have to be our fault for us to feel regret. I regretted that I could not keep my promises to myself. What promises have you made with yourselves? Promises to give up drinking or chocolate. Or maybe promises with yourself to pray more or read more. I would like to believe that the promises we make with ourselves are sacred promises that we make with God too. But if I've learned anything in my short life, it is that failure to keep our promises is what makes us human. \*pause\* But what matters is that we keep getting ourselves back on the horse. That we do not let past regret prevent us from moving forward.

And so God has regretted the violence of humans and has sent the flood to wash the world clean. 1st Peter compares to flood to baptism, focusing on the lesson that humanity got a fresh start, washed clean of the sin of Cain. And I think this baptism theme is good here too. Baptism is the start of a new relationship with God

and it does not mean that we won't regret things. We are going to mess up, we're going to miss the mark. But as I said before, we humans are made for repentance, we're made for regret. Indeed, regret is useful because it is a teacher, maybe the worst kind of teacher because I for one would prefer to learn my lessons pain-free, but a teacher nonetheless. But let us move past regret, what does God do after regret?

God remembers

If you look at the structure of this passage, the rainbow is not at the center of the passage, which means the rainbow is not the most important part. God remembering the rainbow is what matters. Forgive me for making God seem human, but I imagine that God remembering would look something like this. God sees humanity committing great violence, be that wars or violence against the earth like polluting our rivers and skies. And God reaches for their warbow to loose some smiting arrows, but then God realizes that their bow is not there; instead, it is hanging up in the heavens. And God remembers God's promises to humanity and creation. I have a little post-it note that I keep saved in my phone, which says, "you are a beloved child of God." So whenever I make a mistake I've always got that note waiting for me. You may write promises you've made to yourself or have an accountability buddy.

But whatever it is, I think this story is amazing in showing how God limited God's self. God gave up the power to destroy the world. And we too can try to give up

this power. Are we willing to give up selling arms to war-torn countries. Giving up nuclear weapons so we cannot destroy ourselves?

God's rainbow is an act of self-limiting, it is God's powerful invitation and trust that God places on us to do justice and love mercy in the world. God's rainbow is the invitation for us humans to give up the violence that ruined the world before and caused the flood waters to rise.

I cannot help but mention humanity's culpability in our own flood experiences today. In Texas and Salem, Oregon people are still without power. And while they do not deserve their disaster, we know that ice storms like this are a predicted result of human activity. I only need to look out at our own lack of clouds and rainbows to remember our own climate problems. Even COVID is partially due to humans since we humans are continuing to encroach on wildlife habitat. We humans have forgotten that we made a commitment with God and Creation. We forgot that looking out at the rainbow was supposed to remind us that we made a commitment to care for the creation that God entrusted to humanity so that it could be fruitful and multiply.

How will we respond to God's trust in us? What promises will we make? Will we regret our destruction of the world? Will we remember the covenant that we made with God and creation? And act to realize our limited nature as human beings just as God limited themselves with the rainbow promise.

God willing we will.