

# First Sunday in Lent

## THE BOW OF PEACE

### Genesis 9:8-17

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### Analysis by Steven C. Kuhl

8Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10and 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. 11I 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."

12God 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: 13I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15I 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. 16When 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." 17God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

*Preliminary note: I take the story of Noah (Genesis 6-10) not to be an historical account (as though it is simply one event among many) but as a kind of extended parable or hermeneutical summing*

*up of the full vision of what God is doing in the world. It does so by reference to the numerous flood stories that inform the mythology of the ancient world. For the theology of Genesis, God is a complex figure wearing numerous hats. First of all, God is the creator of a good world that has somehow fallen; second of all, God is a righteous judge and executioner of justice upon the fallen world; and, finally, third of all, God is the redeemer who finds a way to supercede his work as judge and executioner in order to bring forth a renewed or new creation from the ruins of the fall. The whole of the Noah story is the law-gospel hermeneutic being unfolded in story form with Noah as a symbol or type of the Christ. The image of the "bow" is important. Redemption is God placing his bow, the instrument of wrath and judgment, into the sky for all to see as a sign of peace. The laying aside of this instruments means that true peace and reconciliation is being offered to the world for the believing.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: THE BOW OF WAR (cf. Gen. 6:1-8)**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Wickedness and Rebellion (Gen. 6:5)*

When we look at the good world that God has created, what do we see. To be sure, we see signs of a fragile goodness. Everywhere we see biological life flowering and withering, economic activity booming and busting, political life ebbing and flowing. But not only do we see a fragile goodness. We also see outright wickedness, a world that is in rebellion, and oftentimes against its own common good.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Evil, Turned in on our Self (Cf. Gen 6:5)*

Of course, whether we see it or not, what God sees is that

“every inclination of the thoughts of [our] hearts [are] only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Of course, the reason we can’t see this about ourselves is because we are biased. We are congenitally turned in on ourselves, operating under the opinion of self-righteousness justly deserving everything our heart desires.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *God “Grieves,” God “Regrets,” Regret: God Will “Blot out”(Indeed, God’s Bow Is Aimed at) Humanity (Gen. 6:6-7)*

What is God doing in the midst of all this? First of all, God is “grieving” over the creation, now turned into a shamble by the very human steward he gave charge over it. But even more, God is “regretting” (the NRSV describes it as “sorrowing”) that “he had made human beings on the earth” (Gen. 6: 6) in the first place. Finally, beyond grieving and regretting God is determined to act. God is determined to “blot out from the earth the human beings [he] created”(Gen. 6:7) and, of course, with that goes the whole creation, so intertwined is all creation, that as the human steward fails so fails the world. (Paul also assumes this ecologically intertwined worldview in Romans 8:18-25.) The Bow of God’s wrath is aimed, cocked, and firing. Of course, as the story unfolds amidst the constant mixing of metaphors, that arrow comes in the form of a flood designed to destroy the world. A flood that is reminiscent of all the many flood stories that exist throughout the ancient world. As is true in the “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” the sign of “water, water, everywhere,” is a sign of God’s judgment upon the face of the earth.

## **PROGNOSIS: THE BOW OF PEACE (Gen. 6:8 and 9:1-17)**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *A Righteous Man Comes Forth; God Relenting of His Wrath (Gen. 6:8)*

But wait!!! Just as all looks lost, a righteous man comes forth from the midst of sinful humanity. The text calls him Noah, and

it describes him as one who “found favor in the sight of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8). In the midst of ridicule and shame, Noah will labor to create an ark to shelter those who belong to him from the torrents of God’s wrath. Who is this Noah figure in actual history, but Jesus Christ, the righteous one, the innocent one, the one with whom God is “well pleased” (Cf. the gospels of the Baptism of our Lord, Mk 1:11, and Transfiguration Sunday, Mk 9:8)? He himself is the ark that shelters us from the storm of God’s righteous judgment and wrath, as evidenced by his cross and resurrection. He is not only humanity dying under the judgment of God, but also God, grieving, relenting of that judgment, and taking that judgment upon himself as the Son of God. Jesus on the cross is God hanging up the bow of wrath and transforming it into a sign of peace and reconciliation (v. 16), a bonafide new covenant, a peace treaty between God and Christ, symbolized in our text as Noah. Indeed, the whole of this Old Testament pericope is a description of this great about-face of God that is known as the gospel: God’s new covenant established in Christ.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Righteousness, Turned out to the New Covenant***

In literary form, the ending of the Noah account is nothing but a plea, an invitation to all who hear this story to believe that God’s promise enacted through Christ (a.k.a, the new covenant) is for us. Indeed, to believe is nothing other than for us hearers to enter into the new covenant, to become descendants of Noah (the symbol of the Christ) and to have the peace established by Noah/Christ as our very own. To be sure, faith is a radical, inward, reorientation of the human person. It signals a complete turnabout away from our sinful selves and towards Christ himself. But all this too, we believe, is ultimately the doing of God on our behalf: hearts no longer set on evil but on Christ, the righteous one.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Extending the Peace to the Rest of Creation*

The expanse of the promise is mindboggling. By faith the promise applies not only to us human beings, but to “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” (v. 10). What is this but God’s commissioning of us to extend the peace and promise of the new covenant to every creature of God’s green earth? What is this but the end of wickedness and rebellion and the beginning of a new creation? What is this but to place the bow of peace, the sign of the cross, high in the sky in clear sight, so that the promise of Christ may be readily known by all? What might this concretely mean for the flowering and withering of biological life, for the booming and busting of economic life, for the ebb and flow of political life? Only time will tell. But let’s go forth from the ark, from the promise, from the font, and see? After all, we do not go alone: Christ/Noah is accompanying us in an everlasting way.