

**aAll in the Same Boat**  
Jubilee Mennonite Church  
February 18, 2018

**Message:** We enter into covenant with the God of all creation that holds us all with love and value.

**Purpose:** To enlarge the sense of covenant that we each hold as part of the world.

**Scripture:** Genesis 9:8-17 [I will read]; Psalm 25:1-10 [Please read]; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

**Synopsis:** We are people of contracts. Our world is ruled by agreements of every shape, size and nature spelling out how the relationships that we are involved in should work out. Within them, the relationship and the responsibilities must be clearly defined, most of all speaking to the limits of who is in the relationship, and who is out. Here, in this relationship with all of creation, God draws no limits. God goes out of the way to name all elements of creation as broadly as possible, including not just humanity (with whom the issue had been in the first place), but the entirety of the created order in the way things will be going forward. This becomes a covenant—the operational relationship that describes the nature of the connection of two groups, regardless of the nature and breaches of the other (as opposed to a contract that is conditioned on behaviours). How does the extensive, expansive literally all-inclusive sense of covenantal relationship move us toward the invitation to receive the grace of God in all things?

## OLD TESTAMENT

Notes (for Bryce's reference):

[http://www.evernote.com/l/APku\\_Ncq-OFG\\_6Ape\\_1GfqZS41WNez-2z6c/](http://www.evernote.com/l/APku_Ncq-OFG_6Ape_1GfqZS41WNez-2z6c/)

[A Covenant of Change gen 17\\_1-7\\_15-17 3-8-2009.doc](#)

[Commentary on Genesis 9:8-17 by Wil Gafney](#)

[Lent 1BCenter for Excellence in Preaching](#)

[Four Stops in the wilderness](#)

*Genesis 9:8–17*

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,

<sup>9</sup> “As for me, I am establishing my covenant  
with you and your descendants after you,  
<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.”

<sup>12</sup> 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:

<sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the clouds,  
and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

<sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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.”

<sup>17</sup> 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.”

We are people of fine print. Our existence is full of it. In our day-to-day life, we enter into so many binding agreements, we barely even take notice of them all. On the way to church this morning, you might have stopped for gas, coffee, or what ever you might have wanted on this particular morning, and simply taped your card to accomplish your purchase. On the bottom of the receipt is the magic words “I will pay the above amount in accordance with my customer agreement.” Whatever that might be. At best this is a booklet languishing in a file somewhere in your home off, or if you are like me in the endless to be filed stack. Its filled with pages of clauses and conditions that set out exactly what will happen within this service, and most often, protecting the company from and adverse results should you become displeased with what is going on. There it is, and we take part in it every time we use our ubiquitous plastic. We click right past those boxes that explicitly states “I have read and understood the conditions of use for this service,” without almost ever having kept that promise, clearing those pesky words out of our way of getting to what ever it is the website is offering.

We would learn all sorts of fun things were we to actually read the indistinguishable small print at the bottom of almost everything. We would learn that vitamins are not to be considered medicine, but rather are merely nutritional supplements. That the soda I readily consume in a single serving is meant to be 2 or three. That the warranty for our new computer is solely valid on Wednesdays where the wind has exceeded 15 miles an hour from the Southeast, for persons whose maternal grandmother is named Mildred. Did you know little silica packets that come inside our new pair of shoes, despite their utterly tasty appearance, were not actually intended for internal consumption—go figure. If can be thought of, embraced, or in any way possibly construed that any item might be used in a manner outside its primary purpose, we need to have some fine print to explain and limit exactly how it is to function, and how we are to respond within the limits of our covenant with the provider of the device.

I have been struck as an emerging aficionado and connoisseur of early childhood literature at what we make into a children’s story. Noah’s experience is the perfect example. Sure it is has boats and animals (a sure path to a hit, without a doubt), but the rest of it is confusing at best. An angry God; a wicked world, and flooding to clean up the whole mess. There is not a whole lot of age appropriate material here, I have to say. The whole thing out to

come with a bit of an advisory sticker warning. It seems the more we struggle with what the Bible might be really be getting to, the more likely we are to make it into a children's story. Yet what is going on here is quite adult, up to and including a God who seems to come the table with an agenda. To pull this out, we need to leave some of our cartoon images behind and consider the nature of things at work here.

In all of our contracts, there seems to be an inverse premium on words: the more words that can be used to describe the way the relationship works, the better we think. We are used to a contract—an agreement between two people where rules and responsibilities are spelled out in complete detail, with provisions for the eventuality (likelihood) for when things get complicated. If either of the parties violates the contract, then the whole thing is null and void, and the relationship as it was structured goes away, or at least gets a good deal more complicated as suit and countersuit.

So you would expect a whole list of conditions coming out of the great disaster of the flood to be setting up Noah and Company for their new life in the newly cleansed world. Yes; there are some expectations around how to eat and the fundamental justice of a society in the first part of Genesis 9, but none of it is setting out the conditions to prevent what just happened from happening again. There is acknowledgement that if the goal of this whole thing was to get the pure people through the flood to prevent the whole thing from going off the rails again, the experiment has failed. If the point was to purify, then why set out basic law from day one? In Chapter 8, there is an expectation that people will get it wrong (Genesis 8:21). So if not hitting the big universal reset button wasn't the point what was?

For me, this is a story of covenant. Regardless of the whys and wherefores of the events of the floods, we have God setting up a covenant with the whole of creation (he says this 3 times—all the animals, birds, etc—so it is a big deal) of how things will proceed. Nothing is depending on how things go, or we'll see. YHWH simply puts it out there: this is how things will be from here on out. We struggle to get this because this is so far unlike anything we typically see in our world. Covenant is the establishment of an active relationship, and unlike a contract which can be broken, it is a relationship the defines how two people will be in that

relationship *regardless* of what happens with the other person. A covenant is a bond of behaviour that binds one to the other under honour to be part of each other's lives, come what may. God takes on this covenant of how things will be by speaking into being the nature of things going forward, not just with us; not simply with the people whom God had left in charge back in Eden, but now God says God will live in love with all creatures, never again destroying creation. God says "you all are in the same boat—all of you all—plant, animal, vegetable, all of you. I promise to remain in relationship with you, regardless of what happens, regardless of how things go, no matter how you disappoint each other; no matter how you disappoint me." God makes covenant happen not to establish law and order in the world, but simply to be who and what God is, reminding us by this covenant who we are and what the world is—God's good creation. Recalling this fundamental truth that God remains in love with the world, even now, even here, changes how we are invited to see the world.

In this season of lent, we are reminded to think again of exactly whose we are, where we belong, and to contemplate the covenants of our lives, those things by which we live, those things in which we trust. We are reminded to consider the relationships between us and God, what binds us together, and what can stand in our way in that relationship. God's covenant was made not only to particular people in a particular place and time, to be frozen and studied as a historical happening through which three major religions take their story of origin, but is a point from which all of history is being lived. These covenants can never be small but always must keep growing, even to the ends of the earth. That is who God is and how God is in our world.

Even this most basic promise of God's love we can struggle with. It can be hard to imagine that the tent can ever be big enough to cram everyone inside, to include everyone. Ours is a reality that feel especially unlovely, and a world whose sin seems utterly transparent. We preoccupy ourselves with the whys and wherefores of God, insisting on our way, our vision of covenant. We tie ourselves into knots, claiming that our understanding and implementation of the fine print of God's covenant is the good news and the way to bring about what we so long to see, that our ethics, our morality, our means is what God requires as opposed to any other. We might laugh at the possibility of God's covenant being alive and well, that God is still acting, and still working within a promise that has no end, knows no impossibility, no incompleteness, no

place where hope is ever banished, where newness cannot happen yet again. God's covenant is alive and well regardless of our skepticism, our resistance, our incomprehension. Because it is God's covenant of love to all things, everywhere for ever more. And that is Good news. It is this covenant that remains no matter what happens, no matter how many times we think we lose no matter how many times we win, no matter where the journey leads us along the way.

My invitation to you this day is to consider those areas in your life that you are longing to see this loving covenant of newness fulfilled, to see your sense of covenant expanded. God's covenant of love is with all people and for all times. We are called to simply walk in that covenant, expecting the ongoing recreation of God's work in our lives, being surprised along the way as the covenant gets ever larger. Where is that you long to see newness yet again in your world and your life? What is it that you are being asked to carry for the journey? What is that you are being asked to leave behind? In what ways are you being called to claim God's covenant of love, a freely given gift to all people, in your life? However you feel it, however you encounter it, I invite you in this week and the weeks to come to contemplate how you wish to claim the covenant of love for yourself, for our community, our reality, our world and to walk with the knowledge that no matter how impossible, how unbelievable, how inconceivable, that life is promised to us in all things and all times. May this be our promise, our covenant, and our cause, now and always. Amen

## Words of Institution

It is hard to consider the covenant. It's this profoundly personal love for me and mine even while it is this expansive encompassing of the whole of humanity and beyond—even the creatures of all sorts are there. As much as we want well defined fine print of does and don't in the way we are with God, we are given the blessing of covenant—of God offering simply in love what we need to recall who God is.

That is what the rainbow was and is for all we following the creation, and that is what the table is for we who follow Christ. The body broken and the blood shed are signs to God's covenantal love for us; unshakable and unbroken, freely given to all who would receive. We come to the table together to be reminded that at every chapter of the story of God and the covenant, the welcome gets wider still, and the barriers that would divide us from each other, from God are always taken apart. As you eat together today, recall that you are loved in God always, and try to recall the vastness of God's love that would even encompass all creatures.

*Logistics*

*Words of Institution*

### **Prayer:**

O God, giver of every good sign,  
Help us to hear your invitation to know that the boat in which we ride is one.  
We are so tempted to decide who is riding and who ought be left behind,  
Tempted to disregard your creations human or otherwise to the irrelevance, meaninglessness.  
This is not who you are God.  
You do not leave good enough alone,  
But you come and save us,  
From the despair of loneliness,  
From the racisms that bind us,  
From the senses of us and them that would define us.  
Save us Lord, Forgive us Lord.  
Set for us your Son's life, death, and resurrection  
As the ultimate sign of your covenantal love  
Connecting us all,  
Amen