

**Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park and Faith Family****Title: Covenant of Grace, Eternal Covenant****Lesson: Genesis 9:8-17 NRSV**

<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.”

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. We focus on remembering Jesus’ suffering and the love of the cross that saved us. Forty days are almost one-tenth of a year and it starts from Ash Wednesday and lasts until the day before Easter Sunday. During this season, we focus on pietistic life and practice abstinence and practice moderation and decide to join in the suffering of God. We also have time to look back on our relationship with God. The Lord has given us unconditional grace and love. And Christians who believe in God have a duty to respond to the grace and love of God. Although we confess and repent our sins, we are still vulnerable to sin. And, because of a busy life, we sometimes forget God’s grace. Our lives are repetition of repentance and absolution. We call it the process of sanctification. That’s why we have time for a prayer of confession at every Sunday worship. Personally, I think that Lent is a period of intensive repentance and absolution in the year. We will focus on confessing our sins to God and asking for forgiveness during Lent.

The theme of the first Sunday in Lent is the covenant of God. A contract we make for business purposes is conditional. However, the covenant of God with us is unconditional so we call it the covenant of grace. I think most of you in today’s

worship have experienced raising children. Parents' love for their children is generally unconditional. Likewise, our Father's love for us is unconditional so Jesus Christ came to this earth to save us and was crucified at the cross and resurrected and ascended to heaven. It is the salvation and good news.

Noah's Ark tells us the background of the flood trial, how the first world of creation was destroyed by water and how Noah and his family and animals managed to survive. The writer of Genesis focuses on conveying God's grace rather than punishment. The story of Noah's ark describes the promise of God's covenant. In Genesis 9:11, "God established his covenant with Noah, 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."

There are two types of covenant in the Old Testament: conditional covenant and unconditional covenant. One of the examples of conditional covenant is the Ten Commandments. It contains ten rules the Israelites must observe: No other gods, no idols, keep the Sabbath holy, don't murder, don't lie, and so on. If people don't observe, the relationship of covenant breaks up. On the other hand, there isn't any condition in unconditional covenant because God offers mercy one-sidedly. The covenant between God and Noah was an example of unconditional covenant. Although the world was destroyed by the waters of a flood due to the depravity of human, God established the covenant with humans as well as animals because of the obedience and faith of Noah.

In this story, Noah represents all human beings. According to Genesis 6:8, Noah was a righteous man. Even if the world goes wrong, the story of Noah is an example of how humans can live properly obedient to God. In other words, humans are vulnerable to sin, but also have an ability to reject sins by faith. In a world full of evil and corruption, Noah was a ray of hope. Through this story, the Bible tells us that there are those who obey the Lord even in a corrupted world and we can also repel the temptation of sin and evil by obeying God like Noah.

God's covenant shows God's strong will to save humans. The sign is a rainbow: "I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth" (13) The sign of God's covenant with Noah and animals of the earth was a rainbow. We call it the rainbow covenant. The rainbow makes us remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh even though we sometimes forget the grace of God. (16)

After a long flood, the rainbow God showed is God's love and shows that He is always with us. It is a sign of God's covenant to humanity standing between punishment and salvation, death and grace.

In fact, a bow is a tool used in war but God used it as a sign of reconciliation between God and humans. Rainbow means that God forgives all human sins with unconditional grace and love. This appears as the eternal covenant between God and humans through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Frankly speaking, I got to know that rainbow means hope and blessings after I came to the United States. It is not easy to see the sky in Korea, like one can in America, because there are so many high-rise buildings and apartments in Korea. When I was in Korea, I didn't have many opportunities to see a rainbow. For your information, before I got married, My wife lived with her family on the tenth floor of the apartment and my home was on the second floor in each building. Last March, by the way, I had an interview to be a certified candidate and get the local pastor license. I prepared and practiced a lot, but I was still nervous. On the day of the interview, my pastor came to pray for me at the place of the interview. It rained while I was going to the interview place, but it stopped raining when I got there. When I met her in the parking lot, she looked at me and smiled and told me that she saw a rainbow on her way there. She said, "God blessed you and today you will pass the interview with the grace of God."

A rainbow is a sign that reaffirms God's promise to humans. Also, whenever people of faith see a rainbow, they remember God's promise and confess that they live in it. The book of Genesis contains wisdom the secular world can't give. When we see the world through the eyes of faith, we can see the world differently. In Genesis chapter 9, the term, covenant, is repeated seven times. Our father established an eternal covenant with us. The sign of this is a rainbow and the proof of this is the cross. Through the covenant, we become a partner of God. Those who believe in it will live differently from the way the world does.

I hope you remember He established the eternal covenant for you and the signs are the rainbow, ark and cross. Thus, we must make every effort to live according to God's will during Lent. As those who are indebted to God, we must strive to change our wrong lifestyle that has polluted ourselves and the world and made it sick, and to restore God's creation order.

May the grace and love of God touch our hearts and lead our hope, plans, and lives to follow him during this Lent. Amen.