

**“Signs of Promise - February 26, 2012
Gen.9:8-17, Mark 1:8-**

I

Two children are talking together... One child asks the other...

Would you forget me in an hour?	No.
Would you forget me in a day?	No.
Would you forget me in a month?	No.
Promise?	Promise.
Knock, knock	Who's there?
I though you said you wouldn't forget me?!	

Sure its just a joke, but most of us probably know first hand the disappointment and hurt that comes when promises aren't kept. Friends who have broken confidence, suppliers who haven't met production or shipping deadlines, products that don't hold up to the advertising claims or marriage vows that have fallen into disregard. Perhaps we've even been the ones to break the promise. Sometimes our intentions are great and then something unexpected prevents us from following through. Sometimes we make promises without thinking through implications or worse yet without any intention of keeping them, simply jumping through the hoops as it were to get our own way.

And of course, there are the promises that should never be asked, and need to be broken - when adults hurt children or professionals betray the trust of those in their care, telling them to keep it "our little secret" or in the case of some requests being made when a person is dying which place unreasonable expectations on the mourners. Like the 50 ways to leave your lover song, there are probably as many ways to break promises as there are people who make them!

Over against our fragile human promises, we hear today of one of God's promises. From the book of Genesis, God speaks to Noah and all creation. After the flood, after God's destruction, comes a blessing. A promise. Never again. Never again will God destroy all living things. It sounds so simple, easy almost, but if we read back in Genesis, we find the relationship between God and humanity has become quite strained. God has even gone so far as to say God is sorry to have created human beings, for the thoughts of their hearts are continually evil. Lots of people get stuck on that part and continue to see God solely as the God of vengeance and judgement.

And we might get caught up in that view of God, particularly if our forbears tried to beat us into submission with it. Or we might join the debate as to whether or not it really happened, rejecting it as scientifically improbable or adding our support to the millions already spent on searching for Mount Ararat and remnants of the Ark. Or we might choose to discard this story as so much myth, as many other cultural histories retell stories of floods which wiped out all but a faithful few.

And yet if we stop now, if we just turn aside from scripture when it gets confusing or because we disagree with something that is said, we risk missing both a deeper understanding of ourselves and of this God who makes promises. Something happens when we persevere. We know from experience that friendship's deepen when we risk both the hurt and the joy of walking with another through the thick and thin of living. In this case, something has already happened for God. Despite the frustration and disappointment God has expressed about humanity, God has second thoughts. The NRSV translates the beginning of chapter 8, "But God

remembered Noah and all the animals, both wild and domestic, that were on the ark. “

The Hebrew word to remember goes far beyond a simple recollection of forgotten trivia. It pushes us to imagine God also remembering the love with which those animals and creatures were created.

It calls to mind the goodness God felt as God rested after the labour of each creation. In God's remembering something changes. And its not really us humans. There's still a fair bit of evil in the world and even in our own hearts, the tendencies to greed and spite well up too often unbidden.

The change has come in God. God looks at Noah and his family, who despite having been given life by God's creative power, despite having survived the flood through God's providence, are already within a few chapters back to choosing evil and refusing to take responsibility for their ways. And instead of more violence. God promises to look after them. God may be sorely disappointed but God chooses to love. Evil may not have been eradicated, but God promises it will not come from God, either as a means of punishment or rejection. Instead God speaks about grace, freely given and undeserved.

God chooses to enter into a covenant relationship with all creation, not just us humans. And God chooses to be limited by that relationship regardless of our response. God will not resort to violence to coerce our faithfulness, nor to punish our lack thereof. It's as if God discovers a new way to deal with evil - one of long suffering solidarity. Not that God tolerates evil or injustice but rather God seeks other ways to counter it than complete annihilation . And God's promise exceeds any life time warranty we've ever known. Like the sign in the middle east street bazaar - “If it breaks, bring it back. I will fix it!” God says this promise is not just for now, but for all

generations.

And the sign of God's promise? God's bow will rest in the sky. Again our English doesn't quite catch the flavour of the Hebrew, it's not just the pretty rainbow we imagine, but the archer's bow. A weapon of war shall become the sign of God's commitment to peaceable solutions. A reminder for both God and us that God is choosing a new way. God's covenant is not dependent on our participation, but God rejoices when even one sinner responds. The early church and generations of faithful Christians since, have seen in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, a continuation of that covenant. This table serves as a reminder that even when we betray and abandon the one who gives us life, God does not abandon us. There is a welcome place here, grace to begin again and sustenance to equip us for our journey.

As we begin this journey through Lent to Easter, from wilderness to garden and beyond, we are invited to remember God's covenant with us. Through Christ, God promises to remember us, even if we forget God. No matter what we've done - when we stand at the door and knock, God won't ask "who's there?"

Lent is a time for us to consider our response to such a gift. To test our own responses against the world's use of violence and power to achieve its ends. Even if all we see around us, or read on our kindle or hear on our iphone is destruction and devastation, God remembers. God remembers the goodness of creation, the possibilities of love and invites us to notice the signs of promise all around us. God's intention for all creation, whether we walk our own ways or whether we struggle to walk in God's way is loving and healing. Perhaps as people of faith it's our turn to ante up. To use this lenten time to nurture our relationship with God, that we might be

living signs of God's promise for one another, for the stranger who comes unbidden into our lives, searching, hoping that this time it will be different. God being our helper... may it be so. Amen.