

THE STINK AND THE STORM
Fourth in a Lenten Sermon Series: "What Does The Church of the Covenant Mean?"
March 23, 2014 –Genesis 9: 8-17
The Church of the Covenant

If Noah had a Facebook account and if he updated his status during the flood what would he have posted? He would have put on his Facebook page –“Still raining. Still cleaning up.” All the animals had gathered inside the ark, two by two. God had purposed an inundation such as the world had never seen before, to wash clean the sinfulness of His creation. The ark was actually a large box that floated and it protected those whom the Lord was saving until the storms abated. Imagine all the different animals on the inside, all of those creatures, none of whom got along with one another –the Lion and the lamb. – the mongoose and the snake. –the hawk and the dove. God had assembled whom God chose to assemble and save; some were compatible with one another; some were not. The predator and the prey all together in the same box. Mortal enemies, side by side. Imagine the stink on the inside of the ark; the noise and the animals going after one another. Noah became the referee for the animal kingdom. Noah’s ark is always seen in scripture as a symbol and a sign of the church. God has assembled and chosen whom He wills to be saved. He gathers us into the relative safety of the church, “The Ark of the Covenant”, if you will. God chooses. Why God chose to include mosquitoes and cockroaches is beyond me –God’s mercy is inscrutable and unfathomable. Who is in the ark is because God has called us and God has claimed us and God makes and initiates covenant with us. And sometimes there’s “stink” on the inside of the church; sometimes like the animals in Noah’s Ark we fight and disagree. But may I always say this about the church, just as we may say this about the ark –

THE STINK ON THE INSIDE IS ALWAYS BETTER THAN THE STORM ON THE OUTSIDE.

Pastor Emily and I are preaching on the nature and the meaning of COVENANT throughout Lent this year. What does it mean to be “The Church of the Covenant”? The covenant with Noah is referred to as the Noaic Covenant. There in Genesis 9 God makes a declarative promise to Noah and all his descendants, including us. God promises: *“I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood...”* (and God continues) *“This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you...for all future generations. I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant...”* (Genesis 9: 11-13) A rainbow is a sign of God’s covenant with us. God promises that every time HE sees a rainbow HE will remember HIS covenant with us. And every time we see a rainbow we are to remember God’s *“everlasting covenant”* with us, as well. (Genesis 9: 16)

First, note that God’s covenant is an *everlasting* covenant. It does not change; it is immutable, inviolable, unshakable, unbreakable. God promises and it is so and it is so –FOREVER. Second, note that it establishes a *relationship*. Covenant is a synonym for relationship; it means the same thing. It is God reaching out to HIS creation and not us reaching out to God. God initiates it; God promises it; God keeps it. It is the way HE relates to us personally and directly. This personal relationship is established through an alive, personal God. Third, note that this covenant is *unilateral*. God does the choosing; God does the initiating; God reaches out to Noah and through Noah to all humanity in every time and place. There is nothing which Noah does to earn the relationship. Noah does not initiate relationship with God; God initiates relationship with Noah. Fourth, note that the Noaic Covenant is *unconditional*. There is no “if” and “then” about it. As in, IF you are good Noah THEN I will not destroy the earth again. IF you are obedient THEN I will bless my creation. Unlike the covenant with Adam this Covenant is UNCONDITIONAL. So God comes to Noah after the flood waters have receded. And God makes Noah and us a promise. And this promise is an EVERLASTING, RELATIONAL, UNILATERAL and UNCONDITIONAL

promise to us. Sayeth the Lord: *“I will never seek to destroy you again; I will always save a faithful remnant of humanity; I will make an ark and save those with whom I am in covenant; I will save whom I will save and reach out to those whom I will reach out to; I will place them in the Ark of the Covenant; they shall be my people and I shall be their God; the life I have created and claimed I will love and protect. This relationship with those whom I choose will never change, will always be at my initiative and nothing, O humanity, that you may do or not do can ever change my promise to you.”*

So we are those whom God has reached out to and saved through the precious blood of Jesus. And we find ourselves on the inside of the Ark of the Covenant, we have been called by God and claimed by God and God has entered into a saving relationship with us through HIS Son, Jesus Christ. And we find ourselves on the inside of the ark, on the inside of the church, relating to all kinds of people, some whom we are like and some whom we are unlike; some with whom we agree and some with whom we disagree. First observation, we cannot be saved apart from a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ AND when we are effectually called by God and in covenant with God we are always placed on the inside of the ark, we are inside, not outside the church. Saving knowledge of God is not just a vague belief in God in our head, no, it is an unbreakable, saving covenantal relationship with God that ALWAYS then places us into relationship with the rest of those being saved on the inside of the ark, on the inside of the church. No salvation apart from covenant with God; no salvation apart from covenant with one another. There are a lot of people out there who think they can be saved apart from the church. That would be like thinking that you could tread water during the flood and save yourself apart from the ark. Good luck with that! No, we have to be in covenant with God AND we have to be in covenant with one another. Second, an aardvark on the inside of the ark thinks that everyone ought to be an aardvark. A duckbilled platypus thinks that everyone on the inside of the ark ought to be a duckbilled platypus. We all want to create the church in our own image –to look like us, to think like us, to be like us and to believe as we believe. And then we are shocked to discover that an aardvark does not agree with a duckbilled platypus that they should be like a duckbilled platypus. God calls whom God calls and God assembles whom God assembles and God places us in the ark because God chooses to do so and God puts us in a church with other people who are NOT like us. Do you see the humorous irony in all this? The stink in the church is because God does the picking and choosing and we do not do the picking and choosing. That person you’d just as soon trade to the United Methodists for a future draft choice is part of God’s covenant and plan of salvation for you. You need them as much as they need you. The stink in the church is caused by whom God has chosen to be on the inside of the ark. This is the cause of fights and disagreements and stink in the church. And I think this can be very off-putting to people sometime. They think they can go elsewhere and find a perfect church and all they find is the same fallen creation stinking up the ark. Same fallen people, same ark, different issues. Or someone gets turned off by the disagreement. Or gets hurt when someone doesn’t agree with them. Or their faith is lost or diminished when they see Good Christians (whatever that means) fighting about something.

No beloved, THE STINK ON THE INSIDE IS BETTER THAN THE STORM ON THE OUTSIDE. Because only those in covenant with God on the inside of the ark will be saved.

The men’s group here at The Church of the Covenant went out to pray at the Upper Buffalo Presbyterian Church a while back. It’s the place where more than 10,000 turned up and were saved and brought into the ark way back in 1802. The beginning of the strength of the Presbyterian Church in Western Pennsylvania began in Upper Buffalo. And when we arrived there was a great thunderstorm, a real “gully washer” if you know what I mean. You know its bad when you see animals beginning to assemble two by two and look for an ark. That’s how fierce it was. So strong, no one could get out of their car. It looked like a complete bust as an event. But finally the rain began to lessen and we went into the

church to pray. And we were learning about and praying about the Lord Jesus reviving and spiritually renewing His church. Lord, if it could happen here for us more than 200 years ago, could it happen again in our time? So then we went out into the cemetery beside the church to walk the grounds and to pray. This was the very site where the 10,000 gathered and where some of the pastors who were part of that day were now buried. It was still lightly raining. We all looked up into the western sky and saw the incredible dark storm clouds still obscuring the twilight. But we looked up into the eastern sky and there we beheld a giant rainbow, a perfect, beautiful, giant double rainbow, arching its way from left to right over the very site of God's visitation more than 200 years before. We prayed. The Lord answered. It was a sign from God. It was no mere accident—it was a sign of His everlasting covenant with us. No matter how bad it may get in the church or in the world God will keep HIS covenant with us. He will bless us and HE will bless us as HE has done in the past. The church, though oft filled with stink, will be revived again. And Jesus will come in all HIS fullness to reclaim and revive the ark, through the covenant in His precious blood, It is Jesus Christ and Him alone who keeps aardvarks and duckbilled platypuses together. SPIRITUALLY TOGETHER. It is His presence and our relationship with HIM who keeps all those assembled in the ark of His church together. As the scripture says: *"All things united in HIM."* (Ephesians 1: 10) In the midst of the stink and the storm it is HE who brings new life, HE who saves us as His new creation, and HE who saves those who are perishing from the flood outside.

Lord, we hold You to Your promise today, a promise of rich relationship and new life through Your Son, Jesus Christ. And, Lord, we promise to You, as those who are being saved from the storms of life, to keep the doors open to this ark of the covenant, to allow more and more, not to perish, but to have everlasting life in Your Son. *"For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through HIM!"* (John 3: 17) Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*