

February 21, 2021

Texts: Genesis 9: 8-17, 1 Peter 3: 18-22

Title: "The Promise of the Rainbow"

There are many unusual tourist attractions in our nation but recently I heard of one that sounds even more fascinating than the Spam Museum in Austin, Minnesota which I hope to see someday. It's a travelling museum known as "The Museum of Failed Products." It's set up to look like a supermarket except that all the items on the shelves are products that were taken off the market because nobody bought them.

Some examples include Clairol's Touch of Yogurt shampoo and Gillette's "For Oily Hair Only" shampoo and Pepsi's AM Breakfast Cola, that was supposed to compete with coffee as your morning drink. There are Colgate-brand TV dinners and Fortune Snookies, the fortune cookies for dogs, and much more.

Can you imagine the disappointment of the inventors of these products who poured their time, energy, and intellect into creating them, only to have them fail? How sad to have your creation end up in the "Museum of Failed Products."

I wonder if God doesn't sometimes look at us, the high point of His creation, and wonder how we turned out the way we did? Is humanity one of God's failed products? Something to think about as we look at today's Bible passage on this first Sunday of Lent.

The Old Testament is full of exhilarating stories of ordinary people who had an extraordinary faith. Take Noah, for instance. At God's direction Noah built an Ark that was of enormous proportions and it was built miles from the nearest body of

water. I'm sure Noah's neighbors had a good laugh about that.

But of course, as the story goes, Noah had the last laugh when the rains came and the waters rose. There was destruction over all the earth. Only Noah, his family and the animals, two of every living species, were spared. For a year they lived in that great Ark until finally the earth was dry and the Lord told Noah to go forth to repopulate the land. A rainbow appeared in the heavens and God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I'm making between me and you and every living creature, a covenant for all generations to come."

The story of Noah and the Ark is one of the best loved stories in the Scriptures. It's especially important because it represents the beginning of the concept of a covenant relationship between the Creator and his creation.

We are a covenant people. We are Noah's descendants but what does it mean to our lives today? There are two implications that follow.

The first sounds a little negative, but I hope you'll give it serious thought. Here it is: **God is disappointed—even in the best of us.** I hope that doesn't surprise you. It's a central truth of Scripture that God is disappointed even in the best of us. The funny thing is that some of us don't look at it that way at all. We believe that God is fortunate to have us on His side. We have trouble seeing that even the best of us is a mixture of what someone called "dust and divinity."

God made us in His image, but out of His love for us, God gave us the free will to choose our own path. And too often, we choose to put our own needs first.

In a speech made in 1863, Abraham Lincoln said, "We have been the recipients

of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. . . Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.”

In other words, there is a battle within the human heart. None of us is immune. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3: 23). At times, God is disappointed even in the best of us. The story of Noah is the culmination of that disappointment. According to the Genesis writer, God repented that he had ever made us.

We all fall short of the mark and so what is God to do? For you see, God has another problem. **Though God is disappointed even in the best of us, God is hopelessly, passionately, in love even with the worst of us.** This dilemma forces God into an unusual role. Actually, God’s last word concerning it isn’t found in the story of Noah. It’s found in the Gospels. In fact, it is the Gospel.

Here’s what God did—He made a Covenant with us. He did that first with a rainbow and later with a cross. Last Wednesday for Ash Wednesday, the day that marks the beginning of the season of Lent. It’s the time when we prepare to face the cross and Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion and resurrection. Here’s a story that I think is particularly relevant for us at this time of year. Major Barbara Sherer served as a military chaplain in Kuwait. She wrote about the time a fire swept through her camp, destroying the tents the troops were using as a dining hall and

a chapel. No one was in the tents during this time thankfully. The fire also happened just a few days before Ash Wednesday. Major Sherer decided that instead of burning palm branches to collect the ashes for the Ash Wednesday service, she would use ashes from the burned military tents to anoint the foreheads of the soldiers.

A firefighter scooped up a cupful and put it in a plastic bag and gave it to her. Later, as she was pouring them into a bowl for the service, she noticed something shiny in the bag. It was a small silver cross that had survived the fire. On it were inscribed the words “Jesus is Lord.” The fire had burned through five very large tents. Everything in the path of the fire had been destroyed. How had the firefighter, in scooping up a random cup of ashes, managed to pick the exact spot where this tiny cross lay hidden?

Major Sherer said, “The message to me is clear: God walks with us through the terrible firestorms of our lives, and we are lifted unharmed out of the ashes. We may be marked in some way, like the cross of ash we received on Ash Wednesday. However, that mark is also a symbol of God’s love.”

Remember that the next time you see a rainbow, will you? God sealed his promise with a rainbow. Then made good on it with a cross. None of us are all we might be. But still Somebody loves us and sent His Son to die for us. That’s the Gospel. A Father willing to welcome home his disobedient children like you and I...and willing to take our place on the cross of Calvary. How do you respond to the promise of God this 1st Sunday of lent? What response would God call you

too today? Amen.

