



Grand Chaplain's Corner

By RW Grand Chaplain Pat Thompson

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I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth (Genesis 9:13).

This is the first full week of Lent for those in the Christian tradition. For better or worse, the spiritual emphasis is often on reflection and penitence. It is a time to “remember” who we are and to contemplate our relationship with the High and Holy One. Our human identity is our essential shared experience with all other human creatures, including the awareness that from dust we came and to dust we shall return. Masons are keenly aware of that truth.

Old Testament scholars regard the first eleven chapters of Genesis as a sort of “pre-history” of Israel—as opposed to *actual* history, which begins with the call of Abraham. This text comes as God affirms the covenant with Noah after the Great Flood. At its core is a celebration of the all-encompassing divine regard for all that God has created. And this promise predates, so to speak, even the great Abrahamic Covenant which occurs just a bit later in the Book of Genesis.

The symbol of this “Noahic Covenant” is the rainbow. Like all biblical covenants, it is initiated by Yahweh. Presbyterian minister and author, Frederick Buechner, dramatizes the experience this way: “In one way, then, it gave Noah a nice warm feeling to see the rainbow up there, but in another way, it gave him an uneasy twinge. If God needed the rainbow as a reminder, he thought, that could mean that, if someday God didn't happen to look in the right direction or had something else on his mind, he might forget his promise and the heavy drops would start pattering down on the roof a second time.”

But the divine promise was and is all about *the new* emerging out of *the old*, as Buechner continues: “With the rainbow tied around his little finger to jog his memory, surely God would never forget what he'd said. No matter what new meanness people might think up, surely the terrible thing would never happen again. As an expert in hoping against hope, the old sailor told himself that the worst was over and that as sure as God made little green apples, a new, green world would blossom up out of the sodden wreckage of the old.” (Frederick Buechner, *Beyond Words*.)

Indeed, God never forgets God's promises to fashion something good and lasting out of something destructive and tragic. The beauty of the rainbow is but an enhancement of the truth that God cherishes all that God has made.

Faithfully and fraternally,

Pat