

*Read also John 3:13-21*

Have you given a gift to anyone just because you wanted to; because you are grateful to them, or love them, or simply want to show your love?

Have you received gifts like that from someone? God gives staggering gifts.

Noah experienced that. He followed God and experienced this extravagant gift of survival. He was so grateful and thrilled with having survived that he got off the boat and wanted to give God a gift in return. He did it. His gift was not a sacrifice for sin, or an obligation, it was simply his giving a gift to God out of sheer joy.

The Bible says God loves a cheerful giver, and Noah was simply cheerful. He was into it; we know that because he did it first thing when they got off the boat.

It wasn't just words, offered in a casual but sincere prayer, but a physical thing – building, sacrifice, a whole person response. All of that was a wonderful fragrance to God.

God was so thrilled with Noah's worship, with his gift, that God made a promise.

God's heart had been filled with pain before, but Noah's response moved God out of pain to promise.

God had been full of grief. But now pleasure filled Him through the give and take of this relationship.

You may find it hard to think of God experiencing the human emotions of pain and pleasure, like we might feel. If so, think about Jesus, who is God incarnate. Think of Jesus being with people, enjoying food and drink, even cooking; Jesus, weeping, and getting angry, being "grieved in his heart when people are mean; Jesus reaching out with compassion to heal the sick. Jesus going for walks with people, and talking and asking questions to discover what people think.

God feels pain and God feels love and hope.

God expressed His hope joyfully. And God made an unblushing promise. He would never again curse the earth; in fact, He reversed the curse He made in Eden.

He had said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground because of you."

But now God said, "Never again will a flood destroy the earth." Let's read it. READ Genesis 9:8-11.

God discovered that cursing gets no one anywhere. Have you discovered that?

The interesting thing is that human sin taught God that. When God cursed the earth because of human sin, it didn't work. It didn't change things.

When you curse things with the intent of changing them, does it make it better?

God tried to destroy the world with the flood, but it didn't rectify or change a thing.

And besides, God just couldn't do it, for

- God so loved the world... , He just couldn't give it up.

So God had to come up with something else. Even though humans will always be inclined toward evil from youth, God would have to help them instead.

But despite the bad inclination of the human heart, indeed *because* of it God gives a guarantee that He will never abandon us or the earth but will preserve it.

Okay, cursing gets no one anywhere. Are you cursing someone who has wronged you?

Instead, God made a promise; it's called a covenant; and God sealed it with a sign. What are some signs of promise we make?

- Wedding rings
- A "pinky swear" – friends hook together their pinkie fingers
- "Scout's honor," or promise (holding up three fingers)
- Christopher Robin to Pooh: "Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

Promises, signs. God's sign is a rainbow. READ Genesis 9:12-17

Jessica sang "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," Dorothy sang it after trying to get her Auntie Em and Uncle Henry to intervene between Miss Gulch, who hates her dog, Toto. Auntie Em tells her to "find yourself a place where you won't get into any trouble." Dorothy muses to Toto, "Someplace where there isn't any trouble. Do you suppose there is such a place, Toto? There must be. It's not a place you can get to by a boat, or a train. It's far, far away. Behind the moon, beyond the rain . . ."

That's what God wants for us. That's what God plans for us. That's what God's love is all about.

And God "remembered" this covenant, that is, God made it happen. God built a people whom He loves through His covenant with folks like Abraham, and Moses, and Elijah and the woman of Zarephath, whom you know about if you came to The Conversation with God on Wednesday night.

God kept His covenant with King David. He held His people secure through the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah; and continued His plan through folks like Mary and Elizabeth; Peter, John; Luke and Martha - and **you**, as you embrace the ultimate covenant offered through Jesus Christ.

That's what God's rainbow is all about. God seals His love with that rainbow, which we still see in the sky in 2011.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him" (John 3:16-18).

Do you believe in Him?

Being a part of this covenant fully and completely will change your life forever. It is freely offered, and sealed by lavish worship and a commitment to hear God's words and be guided by them.

Its destination is somewhere over the rainbow; you don't get there by boat or train; it's behind the moon and beyond the rain. But miraculously it begins right here, even in the midst of pain. And, it's a wonderful world because we are heading there – God's gift, sealed by a rainbow.

AMEN