

## **“But who is the target?” Genesis 9:8-16**

**Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today as we celebrate our Harvest Festival, we have this amazing promise of God to reflect on. His covenant with Noah and all the living creatures of the Earth. But there is one more promise hidden in this covenant and we will discover how heart-warming and comforting it is for all of us.

Now let's delight in reading and reflecting on the Word of God from the magnificent book of Genesis! Sin... is what we find there. “Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the Earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Gen 6:5)

Sin was so rampant on the Earth that the Triune God was grieving in His heart. There were only a handful of people left who still could be saved from eternal condemnation. Namely, Noah and his family. God Yahweh initiated the rescue mission. The global cleansing of the Earth, to give a fresh start to the remaining seed of God's people, only eight souls altogether.

The Earth was wiped clean by the cataclysmic Flood. After the order of creation was once more restored. Hearing the prayers of thanksgiving by the few saved souls, God Yahweh made a promise in His heart:

“I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” (Gen 8:21-22)

Then He repeated the 1<sup>st</sup> Great Commission entrusted to the human race: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” (Gen 9:1) And then comes the covenant with Noah, and this is where we begin to see what kind of God we have.

He doesn't leave us in dark. He reveals His intentions, His hopes and plans for us. He wants us to know what He has decided and what the future brings. More, He, the Sovereign Ruler, binds Himself by making this covenant with the human race and with every living creature on the face of the Earth.

He vows: "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." We are beneficiaries of this ancient and everlasting covenant.

Our God has been faithful to His promises. Summer and winter, day and night, cold and heat, seedtime and harvest have not ceased. There are different seasons, there are floods and there are draughts in different places, but they all are merely of a local character.

More than that. Our Lord has been incredibly gracious. He has helped us to carry on the 1<sup>st</sup> Great Commission, to be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth and have dominion over it. He has blessed the fruits of our wombs.

He has spread the human race across the globe. We have filled the Earth. More, He has helped us to have dominion over it. Step by step He has helped us to discover the deep principles and wonderful wisdom built into His creation.

With every generation we have accumulated more and more knowledge and understanding, and the gifts of science and technology have filled our lives with wonders of this world and have made our lives so easy and enjoyable.

He is the Lord of the whole Earth and He is the Lord of Harvest. He is the One who opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing. (Ps 145:16) We have all this abundance – because He vowed that He will provide for us.

And how do we respond to His prodigal generosity? How did Noah and his family respond? The cost of their salvations was, indeed, incredibly high. It indicated just how highly our God values His people, what He is prepared to do for those who trust in Him and try to walk His ways.

So, how did the only family worth saving responded? We can learn that Noah overdid with enjoying the fruits of vine. His son Ham committed something so ugly that reminded about their connection to the world that was destroyed.

The Earth was cleansed. But not the hearts of the few saved. We can read in Genesis and later in Leviticus about the potential for perversions the eight saved had carried with them into the ark and from the ark in the new world. If interested, for a brief summary see Leviticus chapters 18 and 20.

The Flood could bring God's judgment to the wicked and destroy the sinners, but no flood, no amount of water can wash our hearts clean. Something much more powerful is needed. And this is where we came to the second promise, that was partly hidden, and partly foreshadowed in this Noahtic covenant.

Let's read what the God who spoke with Noah promised: "This is the sign of the covenant ... I have set **my bow** in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and **the bow** is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh.

And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When **the bow** is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

This promise is of profound significance for us. The Triune God has promised not to destroy the Earth with flood anymore. So whenever thick clouds of water cover the sky, He has set a reminder for us, and for Himself.

The reminder of His covenant with all the descendants of Noah and with all the living creatures. What is this sign? God's bow. In English it sounds beautiful – rain-bow. God's bow that becomes visible when the clouds water the Earth.

However, the holy God has not become complacent or indifferent to our sin. He is not saying that from now on you can go and do whatever pleases you, and don't you worry about any consequences, for there is going to be none.

Not at all! The judgment for all our sins will come, nothing will remain hidden, no injustice or evil deed or rebellion against our Creator will be forgotten or will go unpunished. It is such an irony that the sign of God's covenant with human race has been hijacked by the same sin that most likely led to the Flood.

Now it waves at the Creator, laughing in His face: "We can do whatever we want, for you are not going to destroy us, you promised it, remember!" Yes, He did. And He promised even something much more incredible.

The judgment will come. But where will it be directed? Remember, God has set His bow in the clouds. Every time we see thick rain clouds, we are reminded of the Flood, and every time we see God's bow, we are reminded of His vow.

Now think about God's bow, think about rainbow! Which way is this bow aiming? Who is the target? Yes... our God is. He is aiming His bow at Himself. On the cross Jesus Christ, the Son of God, received the full force of God's wrath. The arrow of God's judgment for all our sins, for mine and for yours, was aimed and fired at the innocent Son, our Saviour Jesus.

This is what He Himself had promised since the beginning. "I will take upon myself the sin of human race, I will pay for the havoc and misery that you have caused. I myself will be stricken and smitten for the sins of my people. By my wounds you will be healed."

Every time when you see thick rain clouds, remember that our sin deserves God's punishment, but it is withheld for now. Every time when you see rainbow, remember that Jesus gave His life to save you from what we deserve.

Through Jesus death and resurrection, the Triune God has provided for us something with much more cleansing power than the Flood. The wonderful exchange, as Luther named it, where we receive Jesus' innocence and holiness and life, and He takes upon Himself our sin, our guilt and our death.

This wonderful exchange happened on the cross, and now it is offered and given to us by very ordinary means. By water and the Word. We call it the Holy Baptism. This water is joined with God's promise, and the Spirit of God hovers above this water ready to create a new life, a life that will last forever.

As Luther said: "Baptism is much greater flood than the flood of Noah." The Creator Spirit and the Eternal Word of God are at work here, bestowing upon us beautiful promises, even more wonderful than those given to Noah.

Our God is faithful, there is no doubt about that. He keeps His vows. Always. Forever. When it comes to sparing the Earth and when it comes to granting us His forgiveness. But be if far from us that anyone would ever abuse the sign of Baptism by foolishly thinking that if only we are baptised, we are free to ignore our God and His will for our lives, as some do with the sign of God's bow.

Baptism saves, indeed, but only when received in true faith, created and sustained by the Holy Spirit, who leads us to Jesus, to sit at His feet, to receive His gifts and to rejoice in the blessed community of God's beloved children.

I pray that the Holy Spirit enlighten us with these words of the Holy Scriptures which have travelled to us through millennia and across the continents and cultures and languages. May the Spirit of Jesus dwell richly in us and keep washing our hearts clean.

May our Father open our eyes to see His abundant generosity and care in our daily life, in the harvest that we gather, and in our daily bread. May the Triune God fill us with gratitude and trembling for the magnificent gift of forgiveness and eternal life that we have been privileged to receive.

And may our Lord help us that His grace to us is not wasted. That empowered by the Spirit of Christ we may shine brightly in what we say and how we live.

Amen.