

Rainbow and Christ

Genesis 9:8–16

Colossians 1:15–20

John 1:1–5

Long before it was a symbol of diversity and gay pride, the rainbow was a symbol of God's unconditional covenant not just with humanity but with all flesh – all sentient beings upon the planet. That never again would a flood wipe everything out. “When the bow is in the clouds”, God told Noah, “I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

This is the first of five covenants that God makes with God's people. The other four are the covenant with Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand and all peoples would be blessed through him; the covenant with the Hebrews at the time of Moses, which included the law; the covenant with David that the Messiah would be his descendant and finally the New Covenant that we celebrate every time we make Eucharist together.

So we are a people of the covenant as much as we are a resurrection people and in these times when it can be hard to see the light of Easter at the end of the tunnel it is helpful I think to focus on the covenants. The covenant of Noah's time is unique in two ways – first because it includes not just humanity but the whole of creation and secondly because it is completely unconditional. All the others say that God will be our God and that we will behave or have faith in ways which are in alignment with God's purposes. Covenants are agreements between two free parties to have a relationship based on certain understandings or covenantal promises.

But not the rainbow. The rainbow is free and clear, God's promise to all flesh on the earth. And since all flesh is dependent on plants, we can extend it to be a promise to all living beings.

The whole of the law and the prophets describes God's faithfulness to her side of the covenants, and our failure to live up to our side. We are a covenant people but we are not good at keeping up our side of the bargain. We are notoriously likely to wonder off on a different route. This happens again and again in the Old Testament – we lose sight of God's way, everything goes south very fast, we cry out to God and then God restores us again and all is good for a while until we head off in a different direction again.

And this basic dynamic is not limited to the Old Testament. It continues today – I'm sure that if we sat down and talked together we would see that the same pattern happens in our own individual lives.

But the rainbow and the New Covenant open things up. They break open the model and offer alternatives of hope. The rainbow reminds us that God's love is with all beings every day. Even in this time of the sixth Mass Extinction when populations of wild animals and birds have halved

since 1970 and more than 500 species of land animal are likely to go extinct in the next two decades,¹ even in this time God's love for Creation is unwavering.

And that love is exemplified in the other two readings we have for today.

The gospel writers Matthew, Mark and Luke all start by telling us about Jesus' life. But John starts from a completely different place. He comes from a cosmic perspective. For John the important thing about the gospel is exactly the same as for the others – the reign of God has come near, the reign of God is here and now, humanity is reconciled with God – but he puts it in much bigger terms. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life...”

The Word of God, the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah is not an after-thought. Jesus the Christ is not God's Plan B. No, Christ was in the very beginning and what came into being through the Christ was life itself. We are here my friends because in the beginning was the Word. The Big Bang or whatever started this universe was the Christ in action.

And that is picked up in the reading from Colossians, which must surely be one of my most beloved Bible passages. “in Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him” and if that were not enough, “He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

“In Christ all things hold together.” What a relief. When all seems to be falling apart we can shift our perspective and take the cosmic view. From God's perspective, all is holding together in Christ. “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. “

All things are reconciled to God through the blood of the cross. All things. That's the rainbow again isn't it. All things whether on heaven and earth are brought into alignment, are set right, are completed. Chickens, cranes, rabbits, weasels, dolphins, whales... all of Creation is reconciled to God through Jesus the Christ.

And we are part of making that happen. We are part of God's cosmic story.

Christ “is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.” Jesus Christ is the first among many sisters and brothers. And we are called to be his body. We are the church that the Holy Spirit is creating to bring Christ's mission to fruition. In the Christ is the beginning and in the Christ is the end and we are an integral part of that journey. As Christ's Body, we are an integral part of making that happen.

We are the people of the New Covenant. We are the people with hearts that have God's fingerprints all over them. At your baptism, you were marked as Christ's own for ever. And so

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/01/sixth-mass-extinction-of-wildlife-accelerating-scientists-warn>

you became part of the body of Christ not just a member of a social club. You enrolled in the reign of God, in the new work that God is doing right now, right here.

We can't always see it. Sometimes I take a walk and I'm so full of my own concerns and worries that I don't notice my surroundings. Another day I take the same walk and I lift up my head and am blown away by the glory of the trees or the beauty of the bay. Same place but totally different experience. It depends on my perspective – am I looking at me or at God?

Today's readings invite us to place ourselves in the great cosmic story of Creation and Christ. All is not lost. All cannot be lost. However bad things get, the cosmic Christ has not abdicated, the cosmic Christ continues to lead us forward, continues to fill us with God's love and continues to promise that all shall be well, all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.