

“The Sign of the Covenant”

Genesis 9:12-17; Luke 22:14-20
Communion Meditation

Dr. Greg Anderson
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Riverdale Baptist Church
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Meditation

I have never heard a sermon preached on the rainbow.

And, of course, given how the biblical idea of rainbow has been hijacked in contemporary society, I probably never will.

In the Seer's vision of God, as recorded in Revelation 4, a rainbow surrounds the throne of God as a display of the glory and beauty of God.

In that vision God is described in the words of a song:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

God is Creator, not in any way a part of Creation, but as Creation is God's handiwork, that which we see as beautiful and glorious, speaks in some manner as to the beauty and glory of God.

The rainbow, against the backdrop of potentially destructive storm clouds, is by all accounts a display of beauty.

Perhaps more familiar to us, living north of 60 and in months of darkness, is the sun dog or the aurora borealis. I received a Christmas gift from Xiu Mei Zhang of a calendar with her photography of aurora borealis around Whitehorse and Old Crow.

The photos are beautiful and the beauty is attractive, drawing the beholder into a state of wonder. Xiu Mei entitled her calendar: *Connection Between Heaven and Earth*.

The rainbow, the aurora borealis, are natural beauties, signs, that cause us to wonder, to marvel with curiosity, about Creation and Creator.

The Lord's Supper, now before us, is also a sign, drawing us to wonder about Christ.

When Nancy Pruden cross-stitched the fireweed onto a Communion table cloth she was making a little beauty to complement the beauty displayed in the sign of Bread and Cup.

I have encouraged the church before to consider making our celebration of the Lord's Supper a greater part of our Sunday worship and in this regard, I must say from my perspective it would be a good thing if the cup and plate and accessories were all beautiful works of art. I would be drawn into the wonder of the Lord's Supper if I entered the Sanctuary and could smell fresh baked bread and the aroma of a good Merlot wine!

Beauty attracts. And the Lord's Supper is a sign of our covenantal marriage to Christ, which is the greatest beauty in the Universe.

The grand account of God's ways with his Creation, culminate in the final chapters of Scripture with four blessings, the first is this: **Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb! . . . These are true words of God.** (Rev. 19:9)

In Genesis 9 the rainbow is called **'the sign of the covenant'**.

Following the judgment of the great Flood, God promised to never again judge in this way.

Now, not only did God promise, he also established a covenant to contain the promise: welcoming people into communion with him whereby he would bless and prosper.

And not only did God promise and create a structure, a home; for that is what a covenantal relationship is; he also artistically created a beautiful sign to it all – the rainbow.

In the great account of God's ways with people several covenants have been established and each time a sign is given to the covenant:

Exodus 31:16ff . . . observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites for ever, for in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed

Genesis 17:11 God says to Abraham: You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you

Covenant between me and you; Genesis 9, 17 and Exodus 31; Covenant between me and you.

Covenant is central to God's way with people. Holy Scripture is defined in this way: the Christian Bible is divided between the Old Testament (or Covenant) and New Testament (or Covenant).

In the New Testament, the idea of covenant receives most attention in the book of Hebrews. Apart from Hebrews covenant itself is rarely mentioned, but is in the background on every page.

The one-time covenant is on the lips of Jesus is in this morning's Scripture reading:

This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

The cup poured out is the sign.

The new covenant is the complete fulfillment of all prior covenants as described by God: **between me and you.**

Underlying the covenant is the promise of eternal life with God: one example - Colossian 1:21-23

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.

The new covenant as promised by Jesus is inaugurated with his death – the cup poured as sign; the covenant is empowered through the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ; the covenant is enlivened in disciples through the indwelling Holy Spirit; and the covenant is established for all Creation in the return of Christ with the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Here is how one author describes the covenant with Christ: (Robert Barron)

In its most elemental form, Christianity is not a set of ideas, but rather a friendship with the Son of God, a friendship so powerful and transforming that Christians up and down the ages could say, with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." When it is radically internalized in this Pauline way, the friendship with Jesus fills the mind, fires the heart, awakens the will, and changes the body.

When Jesus calls us to remember at the supper he is calling us to remember more than an historic event occurring on the hill of Golgotha outside of Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago.

He calls us to remember the covenant which is ongoing and present every day in the life of the believer. We are called to remember because just like in all of our serious relationships we are frail people and eventually we take our precious relationships for granted.

We tend to carry on blindly in our pursuits simply assuming those important people around us are always there, always attuned to our needs and every ready to care for us.

So in our most important relationships (to protect them) we celebrate anniversaries, birthdays, holidays. We go on 'dates', we create special space to nurture and enjoy one another for we know, if just left to our own resources - we tend to forget.

As we eat and drink in celebration of our covenant with Christ – remember - Jesus was there for us on Calvary's hill; he is here for us now in the power of the Holy Spirit and we are here for him; and he is coming down from heaven to be with us in his kingdom.

Let us eat and drink and remember the beauty of the covenant! Amen.