

## **“Covenant Reminder”**

a reflection by rev. dr. thom bower

for the First Sunday of Lent, February 21 2021

based on Genesis 9:8-17 and Mark 1:9-15

Every year at this time I spend a month reflecting on covenant. There's two particular covenants which shape my reflections – two covenants which shape my life. On Valentine's Day Ronda and I began our marriage covenant, and on St. Patrick's Day I was ordained. Every year, these reflections upon living with other in covenant shape the way I enter into Lent.

Lent is a time to reflect upon our identity as followers and disciples of Jesus. That's a sort of covenant. The scriptures during Lent are intentionally scheduled to help us engage that reflection. This year, Year B in the lectionary, the Hebrew Scriptures direct us through covenants God has made with humanity. It begins this week with God placing the rainbow in the clouds.

But there is not a biblical Hebrew word for rainbow. What God is placing into the clouds is God's bow and arrow. God is setting aside or we could even say is giving away is God's own a celestial weapon. This is done while covenanting to not destroy. Every time I witness a rainbow in the sky and in someone's sprinklers, in bubbles and on a flag, one of my immediate thoughts is “God continues to give up God's weapons.”

That's not the origin of giving up something for Lent. The origins of that practice are complex, coming from many sources partially related to medieval socio-economic injustices. The Lenten practice of giving up is intended for us to examine what has been interfering with our identities as Christ's disciples. When someone tells me they have given up chocolate for Lent, I want to ask them “How will that help you be a follower of Jesus?”

When you covenanted to be Christ's disciple, what did you agree to set aside? When you covenanted to be part of this congregation, to be the church, what did you agree to set aside?

There is an equally established Lenten tradition of taking up something new. This comes from understanding our discipleship is an act of taking on a new identity, which includes taking on new practices – hence “picking up” during Lent. That’s often a sensibility in Lenten devotionals or Lenten prayer journals: taking up a new practice or refreshing a previous to improve being a disciple of Jesus.

When you covenanted to be Christ’s disciple, what did you agree to take up? When you covenanted to be part of this congregation, to be the church, what did you agree to take up?

Covenants are about both setting aside and taking up. They are promises to be in relationship mindfully and deliberately.

I need frequent reminders about the covenant I have with Ronda – not that I forget we are married, but reminders to deliberately be in covenant.

Whenever I agree to work with a couple in premarital counseling, I tell them we’re going to talk a lot about communication. It is not because I suspect they have poor communication or that I have some great insight about how to communicate. Rather, I tell them all relationships depend on communication, and all relationships benefit with healthier communication. While not necessarily spoken within wedding vows, marriage covenants rely on a commitment to perpetually communicate well with one another.

There’s a similar premise at work in this week’s workshop with Ted Lewis. There has not been some incident where communications were terribly awry. There is no diagnosis that Faith Mennonite communicates poorly. All relationships benefit with healthier communication. While it may not have been stated when you joined the church, healthier communication is part of the covenant of being a disciple of Jesus. I am looking forward to what Ted will be leading us through, because I expect I will be reminded of healthier communications that I already know about and that I will be learning additional ways to be healthy when communicating.

I continue to pray for reminders from God how to communicate God’s transforming love. God’s rainbow is delivered as a reminder for us and for God of covenants began long ago, promises to interact in new ways. God’s

message in a rainbow is “You belong to me, and I belong to you, and together we promise to promote life.” Thanks be to God.

### **Morning Prayer**

Marvelous God of rainbows,  
the deep currents of your love  
have drawn us into covenants of faith.

As a congregation, we are reminded to  
nourish the covenants that hold us together as a church.

We continue to learn,  
by your guidance,  
how to communicate and  
relate to one another  
in healthier ways that express your care for us all.

O Lord, the weather this past week  
leads us towards three distinct prayers.

How minor humanity seems compared to  
the great and awesome breadth of what you have made. The movement  
of so many pieces  
to generate a weather system,  
uncounted dust particles and droplets of water vapor moving around  
one another in currents of air  
is more than we can understand.

And now we are seeing more clearly the beauty  
and wonder of other planets  
put together in your hands.

We pray thankfully for the worlds surrounding us.

From Minnesota to Texas,  
from California’s Baja to the mouth of  
the St. Lawrence River,  
people have experienced unusual cold.

We pray for those without adequate shelter,  
without adequate heat,  
who are lacking food and water to sustain their bodies.  
Call us again to love for neighbors,  
call us again to serve those who are in need.

Our country, our continent,  
is not alone in experiencing unusual weather.

The past several months have revealed  
changing climates worldwide.

We want to repent for what has been  
our part of these changes,  
but we require more knowledge to understand  
what has been our part.

We ask for wisdom to begin addressing  
what we can so that we are working with your creation.

A portion of your creation which may continue to  
mystify us are viruses and diseases  
which make us ill and diminish us.

Yes, we can name big communicable viruses  
that can cause global pandemics,  
but we also know of individual ailments that affects our lives:  
strokes and dementia,  
broken bones and arthritis,  
cancers and kidney stones.

We are grateful to you, the source of all life,  
for the knowledge and wisdom  
you have provided to  
physicians and nurses,  
researches and teachers,  
who help us be healthier through  
the many stages of our lives.

We are grateful for the opportunities to  
continue learning how to communicate with love  
as we discern what is healthy for your church.  
Knowing you guide our relationships and decisions  
doesn't make them less complicated,  
but directs us to seek your  
righteousness with one another.

During this season of Lent,  
may we be more aware of  
what we have set aside and  
what we have taken up  
in order to conscientiously be followers of Christ,  
who taught the disciples to pray: