

Sermon
23 September 2018
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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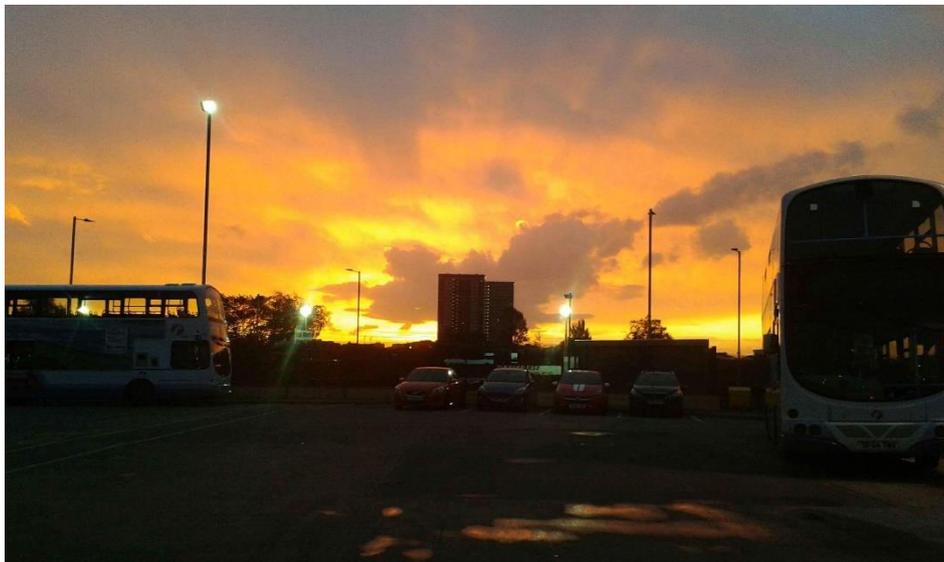
Reading: Genesis 9:1-17

On Wednesday storm Ali hit us with wind gusts of up to a 100 miles per hour. In Thursday's Evening News the front-page heading reads: "It's a miracle no-one has been killed". And that's only in the Lothians, sadly people in Ireland can't say the same.

There are photos of huge trees lying across roads and railway lines, there's even one of a windscreen that blew off a bus!! But I decided not to show you any of these pictures today, I want to show you this picture - this is East Calder church on Wednesday morning, before the storm hit.



A warning in the sky, as I've been taught here in Scotland: "Red sky in the morning, shepherds warning!" And here is another one taken on Wednesday morning by our own Ian Dickson, when he arrived at work at 7am Wednesday morning. A beautiful *warning* painted in the sky...



As I was driving home in the late afternoon on Wednesday, when the worst of the wind and the rain has died down, I was looking around,

wondering when I would see a rainbow in the sky; and then – there it was! So I pulled over and took a quick photo, as evidence that after a storm like that, you'll most certainly find a rainbow – a *promise* painted in the sky!



And then, when I arrived home, after I've had to take a few diversions and was stuck in traffic for a considerable amount of time, I came across this picture, that someone from Glencoe posted on facebook. Now isn't that just stunning?



It's almost as if it shouts: The worse the storm, the brighter the rainbow, the bigger the promise – no matter what happens to us here on earth, God will never leave us alone...

Which brings us to the story of Noah.

Today we only read the end of the story, the bit about God establishing a new covenant with Noah and his family, with the rainbow as a reminder that God will always look after his children.

The story of Noah is quite fascinating. Look at the Bible. It's a huge, thick book. The story of Noah starts in Genesis chapter 6, almost at the very beginning of the Bible.

In Genesis 1 we read the creation story. 6 chapters later, people have disappointed God so much, that he needs to get rid of them!

We are not even 10 chapters into the story of God and his relationship with people, before we mess it all up!! But luckily God's love was (and still is) bigger than people's evil hearts, and we know that, because the Bible isn't only 10 chapters long!! There's plenty to still read after the story of the flood.

There are a few things we need to understand when we read this story.

Firstly, we need to know the *whole* story. I think we very often only focus on the parts we like – the pictures we see in children's Bible's, painted on baby's bedroom walls – a lovely big boat filled with friendly animals, standing there in their two's with huge smiles on their faces...

But actually, the story of the flood is probably the world's worst children's story! People were so bad and evil that God had to wipe them out from the face of the earth! All of them, apart from one faithful family!

That's so scary and shocking that it wouldn't surprise me if some parents wanted to grab their kids and run if I told this story in all its gory detail!!

But the second thing we need to remember is that we can never read an Old Testament story through 2018 lenses.

Different time, different customs, different way of life. But the MORAL of the story is still very important for us today, and that's why this story was included in the Bible.

It was all about contracts, deals. Or covenants, as these were called in those days. God made people and put them in charge of the whole of creation. To take care of everything he made and of each other. And what do they do? Ignore him! They eat the forbidden fruit, they kill each other... And in those days, someone's word was binding, by death.

In a culture where everything was retaliated, where an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth wasn't an expression, but the literal application of the law – God had no choice but to get rid of the people who didn't stay true to their side of the contract.

But he didn't make an end to it all, like he was supposed to do. He refuses to give up on people. He finds one man who was still faithful and through him – Noah – makes a new beginning. A clean slate.

God starts over, because he loves us so much that he refuses to give up on us.

How much of this story is layered in mythology and theology doesn't really matter – the important thing to notice here is that God promises to look after us.

And He gives us the rainbow as a reminder of this promise, as a reminder that he believes in new beginnings.

We might live in a completely different time now, our culture might be totally different from when this story was written, but sadly, a few things haven't changed at all.

We are still pretty rubbish at getting the paperwork right; sealing the deal; staying true to our part of a contract. And here I would just like to lightly refer to *Brexit* to prove my point!

Three quarters through the Bible, God yet again makes a new beginning – in Jesus. Jesus is punished for the sins of the world, so that we can all life with God in all eternity.

And that is what the rainbow always reminds me of: That God loves me so much, that he'll give me clean slate, a new beginning.

After every storm, there is a rainbow in the sky...

And talking about new beginnings...

West Kirk:

In September 1972 the Fundraising group was started, to raise funds to build a new church hall. In 1973 they initiated the Candy Bars, and to this day, every first Saturday of the month, we have a Candy Bar here at the West Kirk.

This has been our main fundraiser for the upkeep of our church over all these years.

But it's much more than that. It's an opportunity to meet people from our community, to spend a Saturday morning together on the church grounds in good company and fellowship.

We have regulars who come every month, and the lunches are usually very well attended, but the coffee and cake in the morning has been very quiet over recent years, and that's why I want to tell you a little more about it – because on the 6th of October we are going to have a re-launch of the Candy Bar. *Our very own new beginning!*

The Candy Bar is the Kirk's Café. From 10am there is coffee and tea available, with either a slice of toast or something sweet from our home baking stall. From this month onwards, there will also be a light lunch available in the form of a bowl of soup or bacon roll from 11am, and then, at noon our famous 3 course lunches are served.

This fundraiser keeps our church running – and now that we are in a place where we need to build a new church hall again, we need your support more than ever!

So today I would like to invite you all to please attend our Kirk's Café on the 6th of October. Come browse the stalls, buy a raffle ticket, and spend time with you friends and family around a lovely cuppa.

Every month a different church group is responsible for organising the Candy Bar, so there will always be some variety in what you will find there on the day. But we are desperately looking for new volunteers to join the fundraising group, and also to provide home baking for the cake stall every month.

So please get in touch if you can help in any way, and tell everyone you know about it – so we can have a full house here on the 6th of October! And every 1st Saturday after that!!

My Henro one year won the Christmas hamper from Betty's corner – and believe me, the hamper was heavier than my child!!

Supporting the Kirk's Café won't only benefit our church, it will benefit you too!

And who knows, we might even get our pews fuller on a Sunday morning if people in the village realise what a cool crowd we are to hang out with!!

The red sky is there – the warning that people in Scotland are forgetting about God much like people in Noah's time. A storm is fast approaching. Let's show the people in our village that the place to come find shelter against the storms of life is here, in the church, where *hope* is always present, like a bright rainbow painted in the sky.

Amen

Polbeth Harwood:

This week I visited someone who told me a story I would like to share with you. It took place when our church here had a brand-new beginning in this building here in Polbeth. As you all know, the well-loved minister, DK Robertson, made sure that the church was the centre of the community.

I was told that he was so worried about a lady who had dementia, that when he chapped the door and she didn't want to open, he just climbed through the window! And after doing this once, he started doing it regularly to make her lunch, so she would be fed and taken care of.

The door stayed shut, so he found a window.

And that is what all of us should do too. It's roughly 50 years later now and the church looks different. There are lots of empty seats on a Sunday. But we are still the centre of our community, and we should never lose hope. God wants to use us, here in this village, just like he used Noah.

All we need to do is listen to him, and if we find doors shut in our faces, we should go look for the open windows. Because somewhere, in this storm of a church loose Scotland, there will be a rainbow.

A sign that God wants to have a new beginning with us, a sign of hope.

The sky is red – the warning is there – we shouldn't ignore it. But we can also know that as soon as the heavy rain stops, and the sun starts to appear – there will be a rainbow in the sky, to remind us to never lose hope.

Let's bring the people of our community back here to our church – through the week this building is so busy we sometimes have to cancel something to have a church project! But let's get it busier on Sundays again too.

And how will we be able to accomplish this? If we can show people that *this* is the safe place to come shelter from the storms of life. And we are here to love and support them, not criticize and judge them.

Let's show them the rainbow, the *hope* there is to be found in a relationship with God; let's teach them about the love of God – a love that is stronger than the fiercest wind, brighter than the summer sun, and bigger than we can even try to imagine...

Amen