

### Remembering the promise

About 40 years ago, very much on impulse I bought a record (LP): Leonard Bernstein's Third Symphony "Kaddish", one of the most modern pieces of classical music I had ever acquired. I was amazed, as a matter of fact I still am amazed when I listen to it. It is full of tenderness, anger, hope, longing. Kaddish is the Hebrew prayer of mourning, and in this symphony the relationship between a person (the composer?) and God is amazing; there is one particular moment in the symphony that I always remember when I read the narrative in Genesis of the covenant and the sign of the rainbow: "*Why have you taken away your rainbow, that pretty bow you tied round your finger to remind you never to forget your promise?*" Does God need such a reminder? What do you think? I sometimes feel such a reminder would be welcomed. Let us go back to the narrative.

What God does say in the reading today, and has always surprised me, is that when he promises the solemn promise it is all embracing: to Noah, Noah's family and to "*everyone who will live after you...including birds, animals and every living creature that the earth and those living on it will never be destroyed by a flood*" (vss 9-11) and then God adds: "*The rainbow that I have put in the sky will be my sign to you and every living creature on earth*" .... And towards the end of today's passage, we read "***When I see the rainbow in the sky, I will always remember the promise that I have made to every living creature***". That rainbow is the colourful ribbon God ties to his finger not to forget. This is an amazing covenant, and amazing promise, and amazing reality for us and for God. To remember. Not to forget. **God wants to remember that promise.**

We know from the Bible this is a new beginning, so soon after the original biblical beginning; and as such it continues to mark our responsibility, even today, for all of creation – not only to human beings, but to all animals, and creatures, and what we would now call "the eco-system". And even if we only follow Attenborough on the television series, we know this creation is endangered and that our part in that covenant has been corrupted. How good are we then at remembering the promise? By the way, do you remember how Noah knew the flood had receded and it was now safe for them all to come out of the ark?

Hold that thought, because in a few moments we will come back to it.

On this Lent journey we can see the whole eco-system is included, so when we reach the Gospel reading, what are we expecting to find? This year's readings will come mainly from Mark, The shortest of all Gospels, and the backbone for both Matthew and Luke. We find Jesus at the very beginning, not having really begun his ministry. But let us not rush – this is an important passage. Jesus is baptised by John marking his first visible act of solidarity with the brokenness of humanity. Then, when he comes out of the waters, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove -yes, the same bird that Noah sends from the ark the second and third time, to discover the level of the waters. The third time the dove never comes back: it is safe to open the ark.

Since then both rainbow and dove are signs of peace. And this is the beginning of the Gospel. The voice from heaven announces God's love for the Son. God is re-affirming the value of the promise of fullness of life for all creation. But Jesus still must come face to face with "his demons" when Satan tempts him (Mark gives us no clues about this), all we know is that Jesus is cared for, the wild animals keep him company and the angels look after him. By the way, Mark is really rushing through these initial moments of Jesus, he is not giving us many details about things, and keeps us on our toes.

What follows is the arrest of John and with this, the end of privacy for Jesus, who is now exposed to his mission, and his first words are a call to trust God, to walk with God and look out for the good news (Good News is the English for the Greek word for Gospel- *euangelion*).

But what is this Good News? For the moment Mark has not provided us with much insight to it. All the Gospel tells us is that the Good News is linked to the 'nearness' of the rule of God. This is what this time of Lent is really about: Walking the way with Jesus we discover God's will for all of creation and affirm our

willingness to be part of that will. And that will of God is intricately connected to our theme for today: Remembering the promise. Going back to that coloured ribbon tied to the finger so as not to forget. Because God does not want to forget, and we should not forget.

In a world centred so much on individualism, on even privatizing religion, the Good News is much more than that, it includes the whole dimension of creation. It goes beyond the “me-based” understanding of God’s work and reaches out to the social world we call the realm of God. The evidence of God’s centrality is clear in Jesus. And at the heart of all this lies HOPE. We all walk this way in the HOPE of God’s kingdom. And our task today is to actively point to that HOPE.

I received a card this week from Christian Aid which simply says **LOVES BUILDS HOPE**. And to me, there lies the heart of Lent, and what follows. That is what our faith is about – hope for all creation. This is the promise God wants us to remember: the promise God commits to remember. This is the way Jesus understands his ministry.

In everything we do to build bridges, instead of walls; our call to work for justice, working in solidarity, in affirming the life of all those who are marginalized, suffer discrimination, hatred; those who are condemned for the language they speak, the faith they believe; their gender, the country where they are born. For all who suffer the abuse of power (Myanmar), the destruction of life (Yemen), extermination (Uighurs), or wherever Human Rights are violated – we work with those who are helping and changing the situation – Christian Aid, DEC, Amnesty International, The Harbour Project, Gloucester House, Threshold, Christians Against Poverty, and so many others – and in doing this we work for and point to hope.

This Sunday is also Church Action on Poverty Sunday, which reminds us that “*the pandemic has revealed the failing of policy making that does not include people on the margins, and it is increasingly important that these are the people whose experience and expertise is central to policy making*” (Stef Benstead, Poverty Truth Commissioner)

We are invited to remember the promise. We know God remembers that promise – the coloured ribbon in heaven, and the ribbon God ties round his finger. The ministry of Jesus. Our call to Walk the Way with Jesus. We are in Lent, but the walk will continue beyond, because God won’t forget, and we should not forget. Amen

**Collect for the first Sunday in Lent:** *God of trackless desert, whose Son walked untamed in league with beasts and spirits, whose kingdom is not distant but breaking in among us; give us time and space to find a new identity to let go of control and walk the pilgrim way; through Jesus Christ, the good news of salvation. Amen*  
(Prayers for an inclusive church)

**Note:** On Tuesday 23rd at 2:00 pm we plan to hold a Zoom Discussion Group on this Reflection, if you would like to join you are most welcome. It should last about 30-40 minutes. The link to join the zoom is:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82503944465?pwd=T2N3RTVqSFBNbTJvdmV6ZFFmZkxOZz09>  
Meeting ID: 825 0394 4465  
Passcode: 745345