

“Put a Bow on It”

New London UMC

1st Sun. in Lent, Feb. 21, 2021

Genesis 9:8-17; Mark 1:9-15; I Peter 3:18-22 *The Message*

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Perhaps you share my understanding of gift wrapping: if there is a bow on it – it is a gift. This is not to say that wrapping paper, tissue paper, gift bags and boxes, curling ribbon, and other do-dads are not welcome accouterments for a gift! Obviously they are all lovely – but they aren’t always *necessary*, are they? But the bow – the bow really says it all. And we all know that car manufacturers are wise to this. Not that many of us will ever receive such a LARGE gift under such a LARGE bow, but we can dream, can’t we?

Back in the pre-velcro era one of the first bows that many of us remember would be having our shoe laces tied in a bow. Later on life young ladies might learn how to tie a scarf into a bow, while young men might have worked at learning how to handle a bow tie – or they perhaps they learned to opt for a “clip on” version.

But one of the first bows that we encounter in the Bible is in our reading from Genesis where God makes a covenant with Noah and all of his family, and all living things on earth, to never again destroy everything with a flood. The sign of this covenant would be the bow that God places in the clouds. A rainbow looks pretty harmless, doesn’t it? But when God said he would hang up his bow – that meant God would hang up his weapon. A bow that can shoot, that can harm. To hang up that bow means that God would disarm God’s self. That God would limit how destructive God could be. . . . And this covenant only placed a restriction on God. Nothing was required of humanity or any other living creature on earth. It’s like God decided to accept the likelihood that all creatures, all humanity, would probably royally mess up again – which would displease God as much as it did the first time around; but God’s *response* to their messing up in the future would not involve destroying them with a flood. God would not try to ‘turn back the clock’ to the time when chaotic water covered the face of the earth and start creation all over again. God chose to take that option off the table with this covenant.

God didn’t have to do that. God chose to do that. And perhaps it would be wise for us to remember that whenever we see a rainbow we can also choose to place a limit on our own response to things that displease and anger us. We have the ability to cap our level of destructiveness before we get to the nuclear option that takes everything back to ground zero. We don’t need to go there. It isn’t necessary to become radioactive.

But it is necessary for us to remember our baptism. To know that our lives are shaped by the wondrous grace of God. Just as the bow of the ark cut through the waters of the flood to save Noah, and his family, and all the creatures with them; God’s grace cuts through the water of our baptism to lift us up into the family of God. Once again, this is

something that God didn't have to do. It is something that God has chosen to do. God has chosen to name us as God's children, marked by God's love.

So as the beloved, baptized, children of God – what do we choose to do this Lenten season? Do we choose to tear the fabric of our lives apart in anger and rancor? Or do we choose to give of ourselves in loving service? I think we need to remember how our brother Jesus was pushed by the Spirit to understand and proclaim the Message of God and to humbly live in God's kingdom. I think we need to choose to follow Jesus. I think we need to give this season to God. So what would it take for us to turn this season into a gift that can present to God? How can we 'put a bow on it'?

Thankfully the time frame for the Lenten season is long enough for us to develop new habits, or to strengthen familiar patterns, with specific spiritual disciplines such as:

- Setting aside time each day for prayer, to be with God, and to listen to God.
- Read and reflect on scripture each day, and to pay attention to the words or phrases that seem to 'pop out' at us, or that we hadn't noticed before in a familiar passage.
- To deliberately and deeply look around us and consider what we can do as good stewards of God's creation and God's kingdom to assist the people and creatures that are part of our lives.
- And if something triggers our anger, let our first reaction be to stop and think what a 'rainbow response' would be to the situation – and then choose to respond that way.
- To let our bodies nudge us to give thanks for both food and fasting, and heighten our awareness of the nutritional energy God provides to us through our food. And each time that we eat may we remember God's desire for all of God's children to receive the food they need each day to survive and thrive.
- To truly worship God with our praise, thanksgiving, awe, love, and humble service.

These are all ways that we can 'put a bow' on this Lenten season. Because these spiritual disciplines and practices will lead us to put our hearts, minds, spirits, words, and actions into better relationship with God, God's children, and God's creation. . . . Which means that not only are we giving God a good gift, we are also giving ourselves a great gift.

Amen.