

**Sermon Synopsis**  
**Salisbury United Church**  
**Sunday, October 17, 2021**  
**Rev. Britt L. Aerhart**

“Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.”

How many of you said that at some point in your childhood when you were trying to convince your friends that you meant what you said?

It’s the verbal form of spitting on your palm and shaking on it. Or of sealing a pact by each one pricking your palm and pressing your hand together to seal the deal.

Neither is, at least to me, appealing, but then there’s always the good old pinkie swear as an alternative. (I still do that with my kids on rare occasions when I am trying to let them know that I intend to come through on what I said.)

The point is, in case you have not guessed it, that making promises is a serious business and usually requires some kind of gesture or action to make it seem real to whoever is involved.

This would be as true of a promise made between God and people, as it is of promises made between people and people. The gesture is as important as the promise, at least if you listen to the old diamond commercials that said that “diamonds are forever” and therefore were a must for an engagement between two people which anticipated the promises of wedding vows. Gestures like diamonds are not only important to promises but also can mean big business I guess.

I wonder though what kind of gesture God would make if there is a promise at stake? It would have to be, well, “Godlike”, although what God’s idea of “Godlike” might surprise you. A world wide flood seems pretty Godlike, as is the complete overtaking of one man’s and one family’s life to get ready for it. “Build me an ark,” God said to Noah. Almost every comedy sketch and movie about this moment when God gives Noah his personal mission to build a boat in the middle of what is essentially a vast inland drydock plays up how ridiculous this sounds. Inevitably, so the movies go, Noah ends up being the butt of his neighbours jokes and gossip, while he goes about building what is probably one of the world’s most famous boats, the Ark. And when the ark is filled with two of every animal, or seven if you read about it in the second account of the flood in the older or first testament, and the ark is sealed up from the inside, the flood pours down from the skies just as God promised.

“The earth is full of violence and chaos and people have voided their purpose in my plans,” God said. I am going to put an end to it all once and for all.” That is a big accusation laid at humanity’s doorstep – that the human beings have endangered the life of the world and God is fed up with the world’s account. Which leads to a fairly Godlike two part promise – that things will come to a screeching halt through a great flood, and later, much later, 40 days of rainfall and 150 days of tossing about in the ark later, that never again will God bring about the end of the world like that.

I suppose even God can have regrets, and this is one of the few times in the Bible that God changes God’s mind about things. There is a kind of sacred sorrow that influences what happens in the wake of the end of most of life on the world, a sorrow that we human beings would be wise to ponder before it’s too late. If God can weep over the loss of the life of countless millions of creatures and people, then so surely can we, God’s

children? Or maybe not, since we still seem to be hanging on to the modes of life that we are accustomed to, even though the life of the planet is affected and is increasingly chaotic and violent.

The good news is that God, according to our faith story, has promised to never again destroy the earth in the manner of the great flood. So, we can't lay whatever is happening in the world, in creation, at God's doorstep ... can't say that it's something God is doing to put us in our place or make a reckoning with humanity, although there will always be growly anti-Christian Christians who will say that. But, God's promise says otherwise. And in fact, God's promise says otherwise not only to human beings but especially to all the living creatures of the earth.

What we often don't realize is that covenant God makes after the great flood is actually a covenant with all of creation, a promise made on the ashes of the past life of creation. "Never again," says God, and means it. God, the God of creation and flood and breath-filled souls, is faithful to God's word. And so all of creation stands under a covenant with God. Or, if you want to think about it another way, God has entered into a treaty with all of creation. God will provide faithfulness and care and a blessing for the flourishing of life. And on the creaturely side, there will be a fruitfulness and a generous giving of life in return.

This is the core covenant God makes after the flood and is the first in a chain of covenants meant to move creation into wholeness and balance. Every other covenant begins here in this covenant with creation. God's love, God's willingness to chart a new path, God's sorrow and God's turning towards the world all start here and move toward the a greater grace that is to come down the long aisles of human history.

The life of the wild things of the world continues unselfconsciously and freely because of God's promises. We human beings have not yet achieved such freedom and unselfconsciousness, yet, may even despair that we can arrive at the kind of relationship that other living things have with the creator of life. Yet it is in the living things of the world that we find the clues to our own peace and wellbeing.

## The Peace of Wild Things

*Wendell Berry*

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.