

THE ARC ABOVE THE LEVEE

Lent is the season of preparation for Holy Week.

The name Lent is derived from Latin, and means the Lengthening days.

The daylight time is increasing each day and warming weather is coming, and this is important, as we all know, for growing food.

The aspect of Penitence and fasting during Lent arose long ago when this time of the year usually meant real hunger and shortages. The food stored away was running low, and nothing was growing yet. So, that reality—of doing without/ giving things up.... was “spiritualised”... for the sake of encouragement.

I supposed it is easier to be hungry if one is doing it for God, and with that is the hope that God would reward the devoted, too.

It is common to re-frame / redefine events. Good lessons can be learned when a meaning is poured into an experience.

The Bible is full of wonderful stories that were retained because a profound meaning was connected to a familiar occurrence.

The rainbow after the flood is one such example. The message is bigger than the event. Rainbows are rainbows; however, because of the story connected to it, perhaps, seeing a rainbow will prompt us to recall and remember the message and God’s promise.

The past several months, my sermons have been intentionally uplifting and nurturing. They have not been controversial or contentious.

The reason for that is because so many of us are going through difficult and stressful times. We needed to hear some palatable and soothing things.

Nevertheless, we also need balance and wholeness, and ... in fairness to the message, the flood story should not be “watered down.”

And,... I feel like a hypocrite saying that,... because Katherine’s baby decor included wallpaper and objects containing rainbows, pairs of cute little animals and Noah’s arc.

In hindsight, it seems morbid to exploit survivors of near total mass destruction smiling in pleasing pastel colours.

BUT of course, we’re celebrating the ending / the salvation.... the part that is palatable and soothing.

I think it is good to remember the whole story.

The rainbow is intended to remind us of salvation and God's promise, yet if we don't also remember the strong biting reason for needing salvation, then the lesson is diluted..... and likely forgotten.

The Flood and arc story is provocative, and from it we are giving a "Sign" so that we don't forget. A sign to give us directions.

Baptism is also a sign. It was a sign for John the Baptist, and God's blessing at Jesus' baptism was a sign informing all about God's special relationship with Jesus.

We use baptism as a public sign to show our commitment to be a following of Christ / to the way of God.

The rainbow is a sign that prompts us to recall God's promise / God's covenant to never "Un-create" again.

And, this covenant from God is to all living things / all of creation... It is NOT just to us humans. We are just a part of the big picture, and we would be wise to remember that—to remember self care includes everyone and the environment.

The flood was God "Un-creating". In the first creation story, God separated the waters. The Flood story is God erasing God's work.

The creator can do that, and most artists do discard creations that disgust them. However, God the artist, promised not to do it again.

Even so,..... it is prudent for us to live as God's creation,..... and ... to never forget what made God so angry.

Genesis chapter 6 states that God regretted making humans.... Because people were not getting along. People were doing violence.

Over and over it states that violence was the reason for the flood.

People were not living in harmony and were no doing justice,... and the consequences of that is engaging in violence.

That way of being is so counter to God / to wholeness... to peace, that God was ready to destroy everything....., yet God didn't.

For no other reason but Grace, God saved creation.

And, the manner / the method of salvation is fascinating... in a way humourous.

The arc was the vessel for salvation.

The arc was a confined place to be all together.

In other words, God locked everybody and everything together in one big room, with no way to escape, and said,..... "This is your last chance. Learn to get along,.... or you'll destroy yourselves."

Be a harmonious community living in peace or perish.

The arc is a symbol that demonstrates how to live / how to survive.

Frederick Buechner eloquently said it this way:

“The ark is wherever people come together because this is a stormy world where nothing stays put for long among the crazy waves, and where at the end of every voyage there is a burial at sea. The ark is where, just because it is such a world, we really need each other and know very well that we do. The ark is wherever human beings come together because in their heart of hearts all of them – – dream the same dream, which is a dream of peace – peace between nations, between races, between [all people], and thus ultimately a dream of love. Love, not as an excuse for the mushy and innocuous, but love as a summons to battle against all that is unlovely and unloving in the world.

The ark, in other words, is where we have each other and where we have hope.”
From “A Spring of Hope” in *The Hungering Dark*, a collection of sermons.

We are survivors of God’s lesson for salvation.

We live under the rainbow – a rainbow that also reminds us how intensely God dislikes violence and how important living together in peace is.

Unfortunately, I think we have forgotten that lesson.

I get a sinking feeling when I see how our society is behaving.

Instead of striving to be in a wholesome, egalitarian community, we are trying to build levees in self defence,... as more and more are drowning.

Excusive communities are common, and gated communities, some with armed guards are becoming the norm in many places.

A Levee/ a flood wall does not solve the problem; it merely attempts to protect A location, and it channels the water on down to one’s neighbour.

More and more it can be heard: “cut my taxes; I’ll take care of myself”,... and that call includes,... “I don’t care about my neighbour or community, I’ll build my levee, and if he’s too weak..... oh well.”

Individualism is the creed, and it takes lots of money to survive as an individual, so..... we demand “development” / personal prosperity,... even if we have to destroy the environment in the process, and even if the wealth ends up only with a small minority. Therefore, we hope we are in that elite group,..... or get lucky with the lottery.

The wealthy / those in power really like the current system... because it has served them well. So, they use their influence to keep the present momentum going.

Taxes are cut. Laws are passed that favour the rich, and the impoverished are shoved beyond the levee/ to the other side of the wall, and that wall is a prison, and... we'll need to build more prisons.

We are told the economy will collapse if we care for creation / if we change how we presently are doing development.

BUT that mantra is a lie.

This past week, the think tank, "Action Canada Task Force" released a statement which said, "...inequality and poverty are obstacles **TO** rather than consequences **OF** economic growth."

This gap between the rich and the poor is hurting everyone.

Yet, labour unions are under siege, as are social services that once helped the weak find dry, solid ground.

Individualism is another term for law of the jungle / survival of the fittest,..... and there is no arc in the jungle. All will lose out.

Individualism breeds greed and consumerism....because we each have to get our own stuff to survive.

Individualism enhances distrust and fear..... because "we're on our own, and the next guy may get the last life jacket, so I better get it first."

And so,..... we become selfish, suspicions of others, and we become MEAN.

Moreover, the distrustful isolation of individualism evolves into a contempt for most anything that is collective / cooperative, especially the government.

A nation of individuals do not work together, and subsequently the citizens are contemptuous of government / of a collective system.

Voter turnout declines. People are not investing in the government, which allows for leaders to become more powerful and abusive, which then reinforces citizen distrust and disenfranchisement... which invites leaders to take on more power and control.

Information is controlled, and who knows,.... someday, the elections may even be tampered.

In the world of individualism, the rich are pandered to. Community enhancing programs are cut.

And, as you know, corporations are legally considered as individuals; therefore, under the law of the jungle / individualism,..... you and I, by ourselves,....will not last long against a large, mega individual.

To be sure,.... all alone, it is scary out there, so brute force is a must.

Consequently, the military is grossly enlarged..... because ... it is survival of the fittest,..... and we have to defend what is ours, and the military is expensive.....so more cuts are necessary elsewhere including to public education.

But don't worry,..... there will be more and more private schools to prepare the elite. In fact, our province has recently made adjustments that will enrich private education..... and the public system will suffer. The health of the community will decline.

To get a peak at the future, we can look south of the border.

I think America is sinking into a form of feudalism,..... where a small minority hold the power,... as they try to contain / control the masses.

So far it is working. Misinformation, fear, endless political debates and hyped up sports seems to mollify a lot of people.

Yet, the injustice / the individualism / the inequality usually leads to violence.

Karen Armstrong said in her new book, "Twelves Steps to a Compassionate Life", "Our world is dangerously polarized. There is a worrying imbalance of power and wealth, and as a result, a growing rage, malaise, alienation, and humiliation that have erupted in.. [terrorism, wars and violence.]

A "sign" that we have bought into individualism is how we respond to our organizations, be it a government or a church. We tend to ask, "What's in it for me? What can you do for me? How will you meet my needs".... instead of the community flavoured question, "What is best for us?"

I do not mean to imply that the proponents / the advocates of individualism are bad. Most individuals are good. The issue isn't with individuals or individual leaders. The problem is individualism.

Individuals can be and usually are very kind and benevolent. However, charity influenced by the code of individualism... tends to come with conditions. There are strings attached.

Individualism influenced charity ask before it gives, such as:

"Is my donation justified? Is the recipient / the cause worthy?

Will that person reform or just waste my money?

Also, I'll only give what I can spare,... because I first must take care of myself."

And, the biggest aspect of individual charity is that it better make the giver feel good / be rewarded for being so generous.

Contrast that attitude to how we screen people for healthcare.

At present, we have universal healthcare. Through our taxes, we enable the system, and there are no strings attached or an appreciation banquet for our generosity.

And, everybody, regardless of their station in life or pedigree are admitted to the hospital if they need are ill.

Our current healthcare model is community living, not individualism.

And, interestingly,..... it works and is far cheaper than the American private / individual model.

Yet, I fear our healthcare system is trading water.

I fear reduced funding will diminish the level of care to the point where we will be told the only solution is to allow private for pay healthcare or raise taxes.
Then,..... what will our response be???????

I suppose our answer depends on how tall we perceive our personal levee is / how strong we feel as an individual.... or in other words,..... have we forgotten the sign of the rainbow.

The rainbow is a sign to remember what made God so angry.

The rainbow is a sign for the survivors who learned to live together in community with each other,... and with all of creation. It is a symbol to remember that God creates a way for those who live in peace together.

The rainbow is a sign, just as baptism is, that we are in a covenant with God..... that our focus is not on ourselves but on God's way.

And, God loves justice, humility and peace.

The rainbow is a sign..... that says individualism is wrong way and leads to death.

In a way, the rainbow is a sign that directs us to get on board the arc.

God will not UN-create, that's a promise,.... but unless we learn the lesson of the arc, which is— our only hope in living in peace, in community – for the whole where all things are our community,... then we may be the ones doing the un-creating,..... and I fear that is what is happening these days.

God has given us a sign with a covenant, and we have made a covenant with the sign of baptism..... yet,.....

Yet,.....

All this surrendering self / living for others... in community demands a whole lot of trust..... way too much trust..... trusting others we don't even know.

BUT, there is more to it than that: ... God told Noah, "Make an arc...."

And, Noah trusted God

Can we trust God?

Can we / dare we make a place for peace and justice?

Dare we live in love for peace and justice?

I think that is what Christ did?

Dare we risk.....not trusting God?

How big is your levee?