

Arvada
United Methodist Church

February 22, 2009
Genesis 9: 12-16

The Promise of Tomorrow
Isaiah 43: 18-19

Rev. Valerie Oden

This week my dog got hurt and he had to have a minor procedure at the vet. When we got home a couple of hours later, we walked in the door as we usually do, but the kitties, who love their dog, did not recognize him. They huffed up in fear, huddled in a corner, and then bolted for safety under the bed, hiding from this stranger who had entered their home.

As best as I can tell, he simply had all sorts of new scents on him, having been at the vet. He was not what they were used to. And they were frightened. It took a while for them to finally accept that he was actually their beloved dog friend and not some horrible creature who had entered their domain.

What is new is often scary to us. We tend to fluff up and run for safety, yearning for things as they were. Rusty mentioned this last week, the occasional comments of anxiety that have been uttered in fear of the visioning process that we will go through together as a congregation this Spring. But beneath it all we are simply Arvada United Methodist Church, known and comfortable, seeking to move into the future with purpose and vitality and wholeness, not some scary beast that seems to have walked in off the street who is bringing the end of us.

Our ancestors thought they had seen the end of their world when the floods came. It filled the earth. Most cultures report an event like this.

And our ancestors said it was god, the way god got everything we didn't understand.

And after what must have seemed like an eternity to them, the rain stopped. The sun came out. The rainbow arrived. And they named, as best they could, their own sense of an eternal promise.

They called it God's covenant, symbolized by the rainbow.

Rainbows have always captured the poetic sense of promise for humanity.

Children learn young the color scheme of a rainbow: ROYGBIV. I wonder why that's important. Children also learn that lovely song from the Wizard of Oz: Somewhere, over a rainbow...and Kermit singing *The Rainbow Connection*.

And of course there is the story of the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow.

I don't know about you, but I must admit to having chased a rainbow or two.

As our ancestors gazed upon the rainbow that followed the flood, they were likely filled with joy, standing on the edge of new life. They had seen rainbows before, but this time it

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meant that the world will go on after all, that there is a future, that their children will have children who will have children.

They claim the moment as a promise of tomorrow. A promise from God. A covenant of assurance that life will go on.

Some generations later, again the people name the promise. God says in Isaiah, "I will make all things new. Dwell not on what has been, but live into what is new."

We have only today. But the promise of tomorrow is an invitation to live *today* in such a way that we leave the world a better place. That's the promise of the rainbow: there is more to life than just us. There is a wholeness of life unfolding, and we are a part of it.

When we live for *that* promise of unfolding wholeness today, in each decision, individually and collectively, we live for what matters. We need not dwell on the past nor spin our wheels waiting for a future that is not yet. But as we live today, in this moment, we can do so in a way that honors both what has been *and* what is to come.

What happens when we bring that promise of the unfolding wholeness of life right here into this church?

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Let me ask us this: What is it that we love about this church? What is it that feeds our soul, nurtures our heart, gives us reason to come Sunday after Sunday? The people? The worship? The outreach? The sense of community? The familiarity and comfort? The prodding or challenge? The pancake suppers?

One of the questions I wrestle with in the church is who are we here for? For us? For those not here? Some combination?

I ask those questions without knowing the answers. I know we are here for us, but I also know we're not here *just* for us.

I invite you to take a moment and consider the young people in your life. Children, youth, young adults. Do they love this church as much as you do? Do they come Sunday after Sunday because they find a fulfilling sense of community, or a sense of purpose, or an opportunity to be of service in the world? Do they sit among us, these youngsters that you're thinking of? Some likely don't. Some certainly do. Do you think they'll remain sitting here 10 years from now?

Perhaps the hardest part about being church is the paradox of being here for us, while being here for those not here. If we find here the promise of the rainbow, a sense of goodness and eternal purpose unfolding that grounds our sense of meaning, do we not yearn for others to know the same? How do we convey that in a way that our youngsters can recognize and latch onto? Will Taylor Grace enjoy worship the way her parents do?

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Rusty and I don't have the answers to these questions. But with the Ad Council we believe they are important to ask. We will be asking some of them together in our visioning process. What does our church look like in 5 or ten years? Who are we as a church and how shall we become? And for whom? Do we want to be a church for us? For those not here? For the youngsters in our lives? How do we do both?

All of us are encouraged to attend the visioning retreat the weekend after Easter to talk about these things. There will be details and a chance to engage the questions coming soon.

We cannot know what ideas will be brought forth in the process and which ideas will take on life and excitement. But it is possible that some ideas will be seen the way my kitties saw my dog when he came back from the vet. It is possible that some of us will huff up our tails and run for safety wondering, "what will happen to my church!"

What is new *is* often difficult. It's not easy being a river into which new tributaries flow. It changes the river, and swells it.

But when grounded in wholeness what is new is also life-giving. We can stand right where we are and enjoy life's beauty, its mystery, its reflection of the sunshine's light. And as we stand where we are, we can live for what is more, building this world and this church as a thriving place for its children, and theirs.

And if this seems to be about a pot of gold that you will never touch, just think of the children in your life.

Will they know what we know? See what we see? Stand in the meadow and enjoy the rainbow's promise?

I want to share with you a song about that that my brother wrote, and a video he made to go with it. When you look upon these children and hear the words to the song, I invite you to think of the children you know, and imagine them part of the church in 10 years.

If you could sing our children a rainbow, wouldn't you?

Song/video: *Sing you A Rainbow* by Bryant Oden, [www.songdrops.com](http://www.songdrops.com)