

**Rev. Adrienne Meier**

**February 24, 2021, Midweek Service for the First Week in Lent  
St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

### **Laying Down Our Bow**

#### **Genesis 9:8-17 –**

*Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”*

*God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”*

On and off in my life, I have kept a simple prayer journal, taking the time each day to transfer forward names and thank God for intervening in the lives of the people around me, whether I knew them or not. This week, the list of needs in our community is a lengthy one. People we know and love are in pain, in the hospital, sitting vigil, missing a beloved, concerned for the great many needs of our community, country, and world. Life is a mess: good people - righteous, kind, dear people - suffer before our eyes, and we are often powerless to stop it. Thoughts and prayers are often ridiculed, and rightly so when they are the impotent inaction of powerful people, shirking their duty, but we cannot forget that seeking God's blessing is a powerful act. When we pray, we risk being and answer to our prayer, being the witnesses of God's mighty intervention, that God might bless this mess we can't explain.

It is interesting that we think the story of Noah is appropriate for children. We cannot resist the darling idea of a floating zoo. The two-by-two animals just begging to be rendered by artists and woodworkers. But it isn't a neat and tidy little story. It is a story where life is brought to an end.

I cannot imagine the terror of Noah and Mrs. Noah, their children and their children's spouses as the waters rose and rose until what was once fertile fields and grazing lands became an endless ocean, as debris of what was floated by, and bodies. These were not

just random people, but their neighbors. I once heard it reasoned the the “Oh God” we so often utter in the face of unspeakable tragedy is, in and of itself, a prayer.

This is a tough story to redeem. And, honestly, I will not try. There are just some stories that cannot be explained away, no simple platitude that makes up for the loss of life. I will not explain away the more than 50 people killed in last week’s winter storm; I will not explain away the six deaths at the U.S. Capitol. I will not explain away the lives of victims of mass shootings. I will not explain away the deaths of black people, Indigenous people, immigrants. I will not explain away the deaths of who hopelessly took their own lives. I will not explain away the losses in you have experienced, that you are experiencing today. I will not explain away the messiness of human life.

I only know this, when our prayers to God about this mess—this mess that we cannot explain—are answered, and when we lean into what God, the heart of our being, is telling us, then the blessing will come. The blessing will come when we comfort one another. The blessing will come when we help each other. The blessing will come when we enact laws that protect our neighbors. The blessing will come when we refuse to speak what should not be said, and the blessing will come when we refuse to be silent when we must speak out. The blessing will come when we mirror God’s loving actions and lay down *our* bow and refuse to do further harm.

Amen.