

Last week (April 8th) we began our new series on God's 'Covenant relationship' with His people. Unlike a contract, which is all about the obligations of the recipient, a covenant is about the commitment of the provider. The idea develops throughout the Bible, beginning with the story of God's covenant with Adam. This is a one-way agreement in which God is bound by His promise to provide for Adam & Adam is expected to take care of God's provision. He had permission to eat everything from God's bounty except the fruit from one tree: Genesis 1: 26-30; 2: 15-17. Adam and Eve walked in the garden in perfect relationship with God until they were beguiled by the serpent and chose to disobey the prohibition. Their disobedience had consequences, they were banished from the garden; but it was the snake/Satan who was cursed, Genesis 3: 14-15, not mankind. These verses look forward to Jesus who, on the cross, simultaneously became the curse and died for our sins then rose to give us life in his Spirit. 1 Cor. 15:45

*This week we are looking at God's covenant with Noah and seeing how it is all about relationship, as is the Christian faith. In our society the marriage vows give us a clue as to how 'covenant' works: the man declares before God that he will love his wife and be faithful to her for the rest of their lives together, no "ifs", no "buts", no "subject to", no strings attached. That commitment is the bedrock for their relationship together. Similarly God's covenants mean we become the beneficiaries of a fundamental and foundational relationship with Him which brings us wholeness, fulfilment, joy, peace and life! **Read Genesis 9: 8 – 17.***

1. The Context of the Covenant with Noah. Read Genesis 9: 11 again.

- Little children might love the Noah story, but the context is human wickedness: **Genesis 6: 11 – 13.**
- And there is plenty of corruption, violence and selfishness in our world today, not only in the news but in our own communities and families and in our own thoughts and words. God's impulse is to wash it all away and start again: to wash away evil & wrongdoing and everything and everyone it has contaminated.
- God is Holy and we are not; therefore we cannot stand in His presence:
 - The prophet Isaiah, while the temple, had a vision of the Lord Almighty: **Isaiah 6: 1-8, especially v. 5.**
 - Peter, after the miraculous catch of fish, fell at Jesus' feet: **Luke 5: 1-11, especially verse 8.**
 - Human sin bars us to relationship with God, it returned in Noah's life (Gen. 9: 20 ff.) and is still with us

2. The Commitment in the Covenant. Genesis 9: 11 -15.

- God declares the rainbow to be a sign of His covenant with Noah. We usually see an arc, but the rainbow is actually a circle. There must be a rainbow somewhere in the world all the time.
- Despite our sin continuing to this day, God has committed to withholding His righteous judgement:
 - He has committed to patient mercy and waits for our repentance. **2 Peter 3: 5-9.**
 - Mercy triumphs over judgement: God wants a deep relationship with us; He doesn't want it wrecked by sin, He explains the rainbow four times in our reading! Also **Isaiah 6: 6-7 and Luke 5: 10b – 11.**
 - We see God's mercy culminate in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus: His death deals with our sin so that God does not have to wash us away. When we choose to follow Christ and unite ourselves with Him, He washes us clean from the inside out. We can approach God with confidence.

3. The Beneficiaries of the Covenant. Genesis 9: 8 – 10.

- God extends His promise of mercy to every living creature. Eventually, we will see that the whole creation is caught up in God's wonderful plan of redemptive love. God loves His whole creation.
- But the most amazing thing is the love God has for we humans:
 - God is holy, but we are not. Unholiness cannot exist in God's presence.
 - God is merciful and patient and has made a way back to Himself for us, a way to be washed clean from the inside instead of being washed away.
 - That way is Jesus – **John 14:6.** When we put our faith and trust in Him; nothing more, nothing less, we can know God and have life in all its fullness in His good and beautiful world.

Points to ponder:

1. Do we really have any idea of the Holiness of God, and the huge gulf between God and mankind in their state of sinfulness, before accepting His offer of Salvation?
2. Do we have any idea of the depth of God's mercy, His patience with our dithering and his Great Love for us?
3. Have we felt the experience of being washed clean from our sin, from the inside out?
4. How can we love God? One way is to learn to love what God loves and to care about what God cares about. God cares about all His creation: we can love Him by learning to live more sustainably. Tips from Annabelle South