

Sermon: 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Genesis 9:8-17 (v. 9, 10) (LCMS Biblical Stewardship Principles #3 & #4)

Theme: God's faithfulness to His Covenant allows us to be faithful stewards

Goal: Trusting in God's promises, we serve Him faithfully as His stewards to the benefits of the entire world, in spite of our sinful condition.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Do you like seeing a rainbow? I'm always happy and smile when I see one; not only because it's beautiful, but because I'm sure that God is looking at it too and He is remembering His Covenant made with Noah and with all the creatures. When watching a rainbow my eyes and God's eyes are fixed in the same direction.

At the services we focus on Stewardship once a month this year. A steward is a waiter, a servant, someone who serves others, anyone who performs any service, an administrator, a manager. Ministers are stewards, as in the original Greek text in the New Testament ministers are called "diákonos", deacons, (*from diá, "thoroughly" and konis, "dust"*) – *properly, "thoroughly raise up dust by moving in a hurry, and so to minister"*. (Internet).

It is interesting that the term *minister* lost this original sense and is now used as a position of leadership and, in the government sphere, a position of power. But let us remain at the original biblical sense for our purpose.

We went through the two first Biblical Stewardship Principles (LCMS) last month: 1st) *God's stewards are GOD's stewards; this means: God's stewards are stewards by virtue of creation and their re-creation in Holy Baptism; therefore they belong to God.* And 2nd) *God's stewards are managers, not owners; what means: God's stewards have been entrusted by God with life and life's resources*

and have been given the privilege of responsibly and joyfully managing them for God.

Now we go to the Principles #3 and #4 based on our text.

I – The story of the flood

The story of Noah and the flood shows us a new beginning. Some interpret that story only as God’s judgment. The Apostle Peter retold it as an event of salvation, when he wrote: “God waited patiently in the days of Noah when the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also... It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus!” (1 Peter 3:20-22).

Our text tells the end of the flood when God established a Covenant, an Alliance, between Himself and all creatures. And God sealed His Covenant with a visible sign: The rainbow! When it appears in the sky, *the believer sees the rainbow and hears a promise from God. The unbeliever sees tiny water droplets suspended in the atmosphere refracting light to produce a beautiful optical manifestation of light.*

(Phil Brand, p. 10).

What do you think? What is your option? To acknowledge God’s creation as His manager and the marvellous things He did and still does ... or to see everything as a common and natural event that doesn’t have anything to do with our faith?

II – God’s stewards are saints and sinners

Even though Noah was found by God as a “righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God” (Genesis 6:9), he was not a saint. After the flood, when Noah and his family had settled and began farming, Noah planted a vineyard. “When he drank some of his wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent” (Genesis 9:21). This caused a big problem among his three

children; the youngest mocked his father; the other two tried to cover their father nakedness. *Rather than dominating and controlling the earth as the Lord had commanded* (Genesis 1:28), *a product of the earth had subjected Noah to its control* (ABC p. 24), unfortunately.

This situation brings us to the 3rd Biblical Stewardship Principle: *God's stewards are saints and sinners*. This means: *God's stewards rejoice in and live out what God had declared them to be through the cross. At the same time God's stewards recognize they are sinners who fight sin and its consequences each day.*

Martin Luther very often highlighted this truth: We are *simul justus et peccator*, - at the same time justified by God's grace, but still sinners as we sin daily and need God's forgiveness. As Christians, we are not perfect and we have to struggle against our own nature to fulfil God's will, to perform our Christian duties, and to be good stewards of what God entrusts to us. You feel this struggle between your self-interest and God's will; between what the world offers and what you know that is good for you and your family. The options are numerous. The good choice comes from God's wisdom to His children.

III - God's Covenant is with the entire world

God made His Covenant not only with Noah and his children; it was made not only with the humankind; but it was made with every living creature on earth. It is a universal Covenant that has to say something not only to the Christians, but through the Christians to the entire world. This brings us to the 4th Biblical Stewardship Principle: *God's stewards are uniquely singular, yet profoundly plural*; what means: *God's stewards recognize that their lives are not solo performances but are personal responses to God, lived out within the community of faith to benefit the whole world*. This has to do with

the personal gifts we receive from God, and how we manage them. St. Peter wrote: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). It is also connected with my favourite image of the church, - the church as a body with many members - as I shared it in my first visit with most of you, 1 Corinthians 12:12ff; and with the text I’m sharing in the visits of this year, Romans 12:1ff: “Just as each of us had one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” We are personally responsible before God; but we have a common responsibility to share and to work together for the good of all, - and this includes even the unbelievers, the nature, the environment and whatever belongs to this world. Christians have the sacred and blessed chance to maintain the world by preserving the nature and by having a good behaviour among a corrupted society.

Conclusion: God is faithful to His Covenant established more than 5000 years ago. He promised: “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease” (Genesis 8:22); and the rainbow still appears in the clouds. The laws of nature are perfect and established for ever, which allows scientists to trust in them and to do calculi even to send rockets as far as the Pluto and even further. God’s faithfulness shown in His mercy in Christ allows us to be good stewards of the gifts He entrusted us for the good of ourselves, our family, our church and our society. When you see a rainbow again, remember God’s faithfulness and give thanks. For “whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it (says the Lord) and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” Amen.

(Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 26 July 2015)