

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12) – July 28, 2024

“¹³I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I 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.”

–Genesis 9:13–15–

In September 2019 much of the Great Plains experienced terrible flooding. At the time I was serving two congregations in South Dakota. The smaller of the two is a country church, located six miles south of the town in which I lived and where I served the larger congregation. Our Savior’s Lutheran (a church building made from river rock) is located right along the Jim River. That year, some of the dams had broken, and we were told that the river level would rise to the point of flooding. People from all over the community gathered down by the little stone church to sandbag and create a levee in the hopes of keeping the flood waters from completely flooding the building and causing damage.

My three kids (ages 7, 5, and 1 at the time) and I went down to the stone church to see what was taking place. We witnessed neighbors and friends working together, putting their talents and gifts to great use. I felt a bit like the people of Noah’s time, in disbelief that the river waters could actually reach all the way up to the church building. But as I walked around and saw neighbors scurrying, working quickly and diligently in the short amount of time they had before the waters would begin to leave the riverbank, it hit me. This was going to happen. The engineers knew what they were talking about. And we didn’t have much time to protect and shield the little church from devastation.

As I was driving home from what I’d just witnessed, I felt a lot of emotions rush over me. That church is where my five-year-old daughter took her first steps at a council meeting one evening. I had presided over weddings, funerals, and countless worship services. I could feel the tears welling in my eyes, much like the waters of the Jim River. And then I heard my five-year-old speak up with excitement! “Look, Mommy! Look at all the colors!” she exclaimed with such amazement. I looked out the passenger window, and there it was: a bright and brilliant rainbow. I pulled off on a little gravel road to snap a quick picture, and then the tears spilled over—not out of fear of what might happen to the little church; rather, they were tears of gratitude. God had reminded us of his promise that he had made to Noah and his seven family members centuries ago. Regardless of what might happen to the little church building, God would always be with us. It took a five-year-old girl to proclaim God’s promise to me and remind me of his goodness, mercy, and unfailing love. May we all be reminded of this precious covenant we have with our heavenly Father.

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