

## **GENESIS 9:13-18**

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 between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

## **II PETER 3:18-22**

Christ suffered sins, once for all, the righteous and the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from your body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

## **THE TIGER WITHIN**

**Genesis 9:8-13**

**II Peter 3:18-22**

Lent is upon us and six weeks from now we shall be celebrating the resurrection of Jesus and the commencement of the Christian era. We shall go from winter to spring and hopefully we will take an inner journey as well as we explore and expose the dark regions of our souls and bring a light to illuminate and heal them. But that means we have work to do because we all have demons within us that suppress the love and

compassion with which God has created and sustained us and has promised to never withdraw from us. As God said to Noah, *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.* And the apostle Peter writes, *Christ suffered sins, once for all, the righteous and the unrighteousness, in order to bring you to God...and baptism now saves you...*

There is an Iranian fable that captures the struggles we face in taking this internal journey. It is entitled, "The Tiger and the Fox." There are three characters in this fable and each has a lesson to teach us. It goes like this: A man is hiking by a river and sees a fox lying on the opposite bank. The fox isn't moving so he assumes it is disabled, sick or wounded. What is curious, however, is that the fox appears to be well-fed and otherwise healthy. A few moments later, the man sees a tiger come out of the jungle on that side of the river. He cringes inside because he expects the tiger to make a meal of the fox and he doesn't want to watch that. But curiously, the tiger already has a hunk of meat in its mouth and gently lays it down beside the fox who eagerly gobbles it up. The man was astounded and went home contemplating the meaning of what he had witnessed.

The next day, he returns and sees the same scenario unfold between the two. He considers the Tiger's actions and says to himself, "The Fox is being provided for. This is what the sacred scriptures tell us: I will never have to provide for myself again because God will provide me with what I need." (*Give us this day our daily bread.*) So the man goes home and sits day and night, but no one comes with any food. The days pass and he begins to lose weight and is overcome with hunger. So he pulls himself together and walks back to the river where he sees the fox eating his fill again. He angrily cries out, "I put my faith in God and God did not feed me!" And then he hears a voice answering him, "Open your eyes to the truth. Follow the example of the Tiger instead of imitating the Fox."

Lent is characterized by self-examination. So what do the three characters in this fable invite us to explore? The hiker raises some complicated issues. In the first place he has some naive and unrealistic expectations of God. And he tests God by becoming totally passive and expecting manna to fall from the sky. If God is really faithful to his covenant, somebody will come by with a shopping cart full of food. His expectations are laughable, of course, and it is a stretch to assume they apply to us. Nevertheless, as we have discussed in recent sermons, God gives us resources to fix our problems, but does not solve them for us.

When we add the Fox to our analysis, however, we see where the hiker is coming from. Yes, he has an un-evolved view of God and while we can only presume the Fox had been almost fatally injured in a fight, he was totally dependent upon outside help for his survival. If you are ever in that situation--and you may well have been—will God simply ignore your prayers for help? How far does God’s covenant with us extend?

I look at it this way—there are many bad things that will happen to us in life and we may not survive them all. We are mortals. On the other hand, consider what medical professionals and emergency services personnel, counselors and others can do for us. There are times we need the Tiger to bring us food. What is it inside of all living creatures that has the capacity to give to others? Has God made us that way?

Which brings us to the Tiger who exemplifies the compassion built into us. The fable is intentionally ironic portraying a predatory beast who hunts and provides for another outside of its species. Why not just eat the Fox? I believe our biggest spiritual challenge is to understand the world through the eyes of God. How do we get beyond our tribalism and to truly see and feel that all living creatures are connected by God’s love? We are not here to promote and practice separatism. We are here to honor each other’s humanity and to embrace our environment as an extension of

ourselves. Compassion is the cure for the world's problems.

So as we begin Lent, let us remember that we are in a covenantal relationship to God. God is faithful, but are we? A covenant requires responsibilities on both sides. If we took that seriously and honored that, we would become solutions to our own problems. Envision that world every day and allow it to change you in the very roots of your being. Nurture the Tiger within you.

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