

“Rainbow Memories”
Genesis 9:8-17; Mark 1:9-15

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I grew up on a farm that had a house with a wrap-around porch, which spanned the front and one side. It was a favorite gathering place for family and friends. The swing and chairs were rarely empty, or so it seemed to me. I have many fond memories of time spent on that porch and it was there that I saw my first rainbow.

My brothers and I were playing in the yard when a spring shower descended upon us. We ran to the porch to wait it out when all of a sudden a rainbow began forming in the distance. It grew brighter and closer as the storm dissipated. I was fascinated by it but even more enamored with the story my brothers told me about the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. They almost convinced me to go running over the hill and into the fields to find the stash until I wondered why they were not heading that way. They could certainly outrun me. As long as they were staying on that porch, so was I. Had they bolted and run, I would have been right there with them.

I wonder what Noah’s reaction was when he saw a rainbow in the sky after the flood. You recall that Noah and his family spent about a year on an ark surviving the flood. That rainbow had to look pretty good to them as they finally stepped on dry ground, especially as they learned its significance. It symbolized a covenant that God was making with them and all living creatures that never again would the earth flood.

This promise was necessary and God knew it. Every time it rained, Noah and his family would fear another destructive deluge. The rainbow would allay their fears and remind them of God’s grace, not His wrath. So it was time to rebuild their lives, knowing their efforts would not be in vain. The work ahead of them would be challenging, but with God’s help they could do it.

Dianne Bergant is a Professor of Biblical Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. I appreciate the skillful way she connects the latter part of the flood narrative with Lent. **“Lent is a time for putting things back in order,”** she writes. She’s right on target.

Recently I took the Myers-Briggs personality inventory for the Klesis class. I took it twenty years ago and was curious to see how I had changed. I was shocked. I am still a strong extrovert but I lean much more toward a plan and organized approach to life than I did in my younger years. I highly value order and logic. Evidently, I used to be much more spontaneous and flexible. Jackie just smiled when I shared my results and softly said, “I’ve been trying to tell you that you’re set in your ways.”

Well, I don’t deny that I value order and believe that most people do. However, life can get messy, very messy. Chaos can replace order and sometimes it can happen quickly.

No doubt you have seen on the Internet the pictures taken before and after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. I look at the difference in the landscape of Louisiana and Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina blew ashore and can hardly believe what I see. Beautiful homes and beaches have been replaced with debris and filth. Much

of New Orleans looks like a war zone. My heart goes out to these citizens whose lives have been disrupted beyond imagination.

Frequently, I deal with people whose lives have been disrupted, literally turned upside down, and they are scrambling to reassemble them. How can this happen and is it possible to rebuild their lives? “Lent is a time for putting things back in order,” Bergant wrote. We need to hear this message of hope and assurance.

What disrupts our lives? There are many things that can knock the foundation out from under us and rip us apart. Mother Nature can certainly do it as we have witnessed with alarming frequency. Last summer was the first time I recalled having so many hurricanes that the Greek alphabet had to be used in order to name them. All the letters of our alphabet were exhausted.

There are times when others make decisions that catch us by surprise and chip away our foundation. Family members can make foolish decisions, causing our home life to spiral out of control.

Tragedies can cause our world to unravel. Accidents, illness and the death of loved ones can leave us standing among the rubble of broken dreams.

We can be our own worst enemy, too. Giving into temptation can create havoc in our lives, disrupting everything that is normal and good. It appears the ancient writers traced the reason for the flood back to sin. Greed, deceit, corruption and violence caught up with them. Their wicked lifestyle choked the life out of them. It can do the same for us, too.

How do you reverse chaos? Can it be done? Can order be restored? “Lent is a time for putting things back in order,” Dianne Bergant wrote. Yes, it can be done.

Allow the New Testament reading for today to guide our reconstruction thoughts. It is Mark’s account of Jesus’ baptism and subsequent journey into the wilderness. Surely, you see the connection with water, or lack of it, and the flood narrative.

Jesus began his ministry by being baptized. While he did not need to repent, he did wish to stand with those for whom this was necessary. He knew how important this was for his friends to reorder their lives. He knows how important it is for us, too, and how vital is that we receive affirmation and help from God in the process.

Baptism represents newness, beginning again. It splashes hope all over us. It symbolizes confession of sin, forgiveness, dissatisfaction with the status-quo, a change of direction and the need for divine approval and help.

This is the first step in putting life back in order. You humbly seek God’s grace, guidance and help.

The second step to reordering life is to spend time alone with God. After Jesus was baptized, the Spirit led him to the desert. Why? It appears that Jesus needed to strengthen his spiritual muscles. He needed a close relationship with God that would enable him to resist temptation and accept challenges. He needed time to reflect upon the past and plan the future. He needed clear direction and steady resolve. He needed courage and confidence. He needed his Father.

So do we, especially if we are trying to bring order to our lives in the midst of stiff challenges. We need time alone with God seeking wisdom, guidance, courage and confidence. Lent reminds us of this and provides opportunities to cultivate this relationship. I pray you will take advantage of it through your personal devotional life and corporate worship experiences.

