

## Rainbow Responsibility

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

### Genesis 9: 8-17



*Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 9 “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 10 and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” 12 And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the*

*clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” 17 So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”*

I need to backup a little before we get into today’s text. You see, before God establishes this new relationship with Noah and his family, (the relationship that was read to us this morning) Noah has been bobbing on the waves inside of a dark, damp, and probably smelly ark. He’d been adrift for 150 days and nights and then stranded on a mountain top for 40 days and 40 nights, which you will note is a theme in today’s bulletin. It’s a theme because in the Bible the number 40 means “a very lonnnng time.” Noah was stranded for a very lonnnng time. Jesus was tempted for a very

lonnnng time. We are subjected to the wilderness of Lent for what I'm guessing will seem like a very lonnnng time. When you see that number in the Bible it is not an exact kind of thing. It is code for, well, you know, a long time.

The story in Genesis goes that Noah was in the ark for a lonng time because God was angry and disgusted with humanity. God felt like perhaps the Holy had made a mistake and it was time to start over. There are 9-10 versions of this story that were floating around before or as Noah's tale was told. The closest in story goes to the Sumerians who tell of a hero Utnapishtim who rides out the storm in the Epic of Gilgamesh. I'm kind of glad we got Noah. Much easier to spell, let alone pronounce.

Anyway, up til the time of Noah's story the people who gathered around God believed that gods brought calamity upon people as a punishment, or as an act of disappointment or displeasure with humanity. Any one person's folly could sink the whole ship and so there was a lot of blame and suspicion that went around. It was literally every man and woman for themselves.

But then something shifted. Perhaps God shifted. Most likely our understanding of God shifted and the story of Noah emerging from the ark caught traction. God blessed Noah and his family, and then God gave Noah and his family a sacred responsibility, saying:

*"But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 5 And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. 6 "Whoever sheds human*

*blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.*

God was stepping aside from taking the blame. No longer would our violence be attributable to the Heavens. *“Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed”*

This past week a lot of human blood was shed. Young blood. Teacher's blood. And there are many who are calling, “Why did God do this? Why did God let this happen?” But that’s not how this story goes. That’s not how our faith story places responsibility.

As the story goes (from as far back as 750BCE), we have the answerability for those lives. On some cosmic level we are culpable for their deaths as much as we were called to care for their lives. I know my heart aches at the calling of their names. Alyssa, Scott, Martin, Nicholas, Aaron, Jaime, Chris, Luke, Cara, Gina, Joaquin, Alaina, Meadow, Helena, Alex, Carmen, Peter.

I expect many of you are grieving, too.

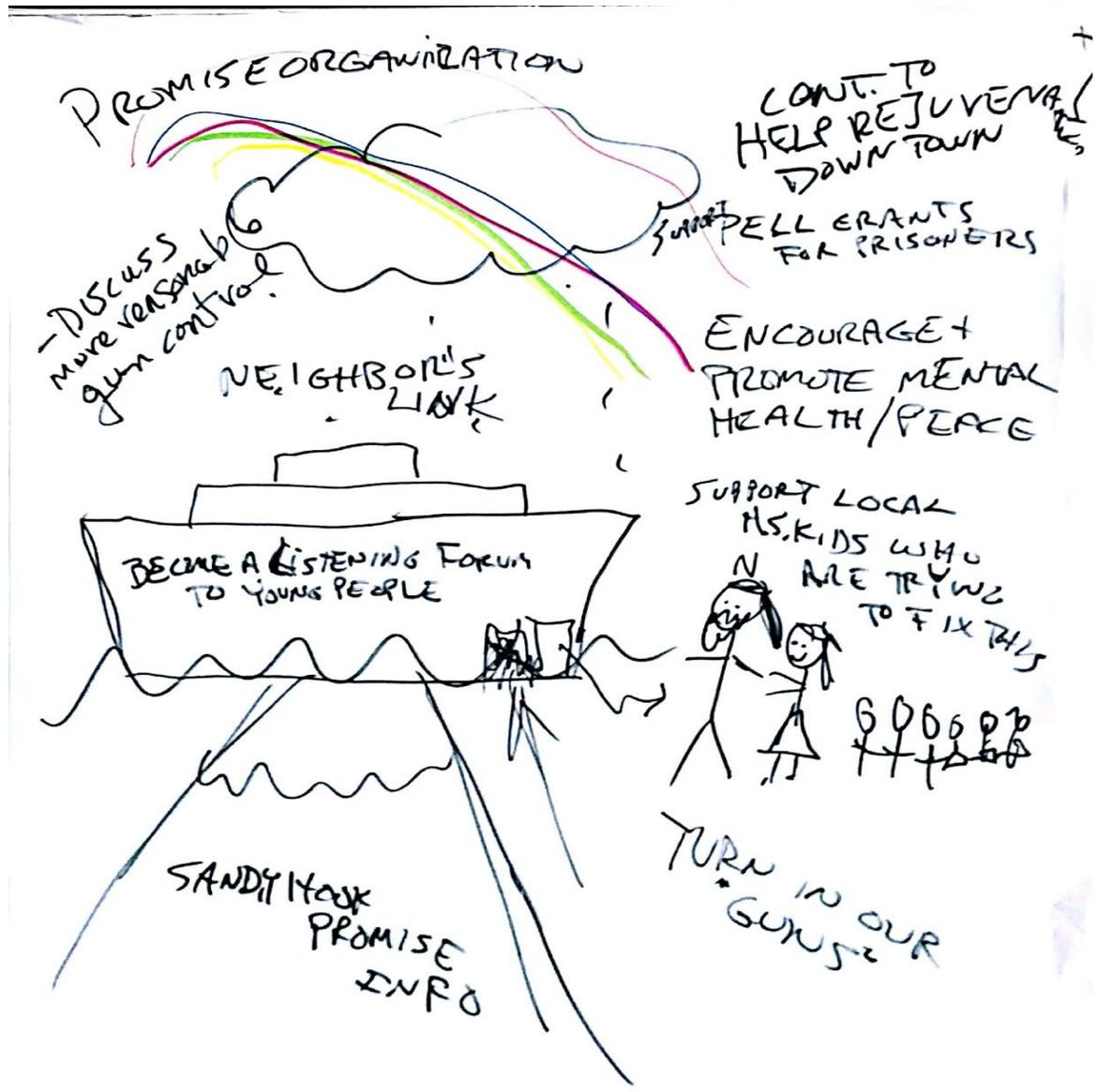
So what can we do? What recourse do we have when we can’t blame God? How can we act on our responsibility to care for one another as God has cared for us?

Those are questions that have been muddied by the far right and far left who shout black and white demands for fealty to their ideals while the red blood of our children runs onto school floors and city streets and war zones around the world. I do not have interest in that crimson mud today. I don’t believe our young people have time for us to reconcile those extremes.

Instead, I would suggest that the Spirit can lead us to a host of answers that add up to a safer world for our children, our teachers, ourselves. God knows us to be far more complicated creatures; far more nuanced beings than black or white answers allow. It is unlikely that there is only one way to fix this problem, so without blaming or extremes, I invite you to suggest a way in which we can help keep our children (and I do mean all of God's children) a bit safer from the kind of violence that occurred in Florida last week. How can we be responsible to them in a way that is reflective of our understanding of God's love for us? What needs to happen so that they feel less angry, less afraid, more whole? What can we, as members of the BCC do to extend our caring beyond these stone walls to the children and young people in our surrounding neighborhoods? And before we get bogged down by the question of "who is our neighbor?" I recall the church profile speaking about Ossining as a neighbor...let's start there. And here. What resources do we have to respond to the issues facing our kids? Our thoughts may include our responsibility to the victims or the perpetrators of violence. They are all our children.

For the purposes of this morning's exercise, let's focus on the ark as a metaphor, the blessing of Noah's family as a metaphor, and the rainbow of hope that indicates God's promise to not participate in our savagery toward one another. The rainbow is a reminder of our responsibility as members of the faith community, to care.

*Explore...and invite exploration....*



I think we have come up with some very interesting ideas for taking responsibility for one another. While I'm away this next week, I'll be thinking about this page, I hope you will too. If you'd like to pursue some aspect of these thoughts as a ministry here at BCC, I hope you will contact me when I return. Let's sit down with others who share your vision. Let's work together to create a safer ark for all of us to live in. No doubt the waters will

be rough from time to time, but together, with God's blessing, I believe we can weather those storms (perhaps for as long as 40 days!) and make a difference in the lives of the people we work with.

*Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: **9** "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you **10** and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. **11** I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."*

God has given us a rainbow responsibility to look after one another. May we honor that blessing as best we can, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Ps. While I was preaching, Nate drew this picture to remind us of the story.

Happy Birthday, Nathan!!!

