

SERMON

Genesis 9:8-17

God's Saving Water

Nunawading and Waverley, 21-2-21

Dear friends in Christ,

If the Narre Warren Wetlands flooded and the water rose tens of metres, I would have my boat, which my wife and I could climb into and seek safety. In February 2005, a torrential downpour flooded the bottom of the street where the manse is situated and floated the boat up the road by about ten metres. This is what the apostle Peter was thinking when he said that **Noah and his family were saved through water**; the ark delivered them through the water. The apostle said that this action of God pointed to holy Baptism that **now saves us**, grants us the Holy Spirit, and guarantees our forgiveness and resurrection.

God promised that he would use the rainbow to remind him to stop floods damaging humanity on a massive scale, including all the creatures we share the planet with. No doubt disasters will continue yet the Lord encouraged Noah, his family and subsequent generations, to trust in his word and be strong in the knowledge that a limitation has been placed on natural disasters. Excluded here are events caused by human beings such as the impact of deforestation, pollution from toxic waste or global warming etc.

The **rainbow** is a visual phenomenon with a message. God gave it a function to be a messenger revealing his covenant with the **earth**. It is a very lovely arrangement. The set-up is similar to how baptism works. The word of God combines with the water so that 'it is not water only, as Luther said, 'but a life-giving water, which by God's grace, gives the new birth through the Holy Spirit.' There is a message in the water.

There is a wonderful overlap between baptism and the ancient story of a world-wide flood. Water is both destructive and life-giving. Floods come from rain and rain is necessary in so many

obvious ways, allowing for shipping, drinking and irrigation, the distribution of alluvial sediments and the sustaining of the plant and animal kingdoms. Our baptism is the end of an old life of resisting God and doing as we please. It was drowned and we continue to drown it each day as we live in our baptisms. From the water, a new person arises, joined to Christ and striving each day to be like him and never part from him. Water can drown but also give life; likewise, baptism kills and makes alive.

By simply looking at the sky on showery and sunny day, we can see a sign of God's faithful love toward us. His word is tangible, never an idea but a power of grace that acts in this physical world. His word also acts in the water splashed over us in the font. It is a beautiful thing for God's deliverance to actually be applied to us as water is poured on us. Our Father **passes us through the waters** and we are saved.

It seems strange that the Lord needs a rainbow to act like a sticky note on his shaving mirror: "Oh yes, I mustn't be too hard on the old earth!" **He will see the rainbow and be reminded**, we read. Could God forget? Obviously not. What the Lord is telling us is that the covenant places him under an obligation and the sign of the rainbow constrains him to act in favour of the world. God has to stick to his word and cannot forget it or abrogate it. In baptism, God does something real, as I said, but the water acts as a sign for the Lord. When Christ comes on the last day, he cannot forget that water was applied to his chosen people. Though our sins are intolerable to the Lord, the water makes him recall what he has done to us and his gratuitous, bounteous love will take over.

The earth can be a dangerous place but the Lord's feeling for us and for his creatures is stronger still. These are the same feelings that moved him to come onto this earth himself and to live in very hostile places. The wilderness was one of them but so, too, was the corrupt world of politics and world of weak men and women, some of whom betrayed him and plotted his death. It only seems natural, then, that he could be found in a dangerous thing like water. Yet, what a marvel that Christ could take up water and

breathe his word into it, filling it with all his promises and apply it to us. Water can be dangerous yet Christ uses it to save us.