

### Genesis 9:8-17

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 that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.



### "Keeping Tethered to God"

At once the Spirit sent Jesus out into the desert,  
And he was in the wilderness forty days  
being tempted by Satan there,  
And the angels ministered to him.

Mark 1:12-13

For forty days in the wilderness, satan did the devil's best to feed survival fears in order to cause a rupture between Jesus' self and Soul. Christian mystic Julian of Norwich shared her insights on this human problem of sin. In her book, 'Transfiguring Loss', Jane Maynard wrote: Julian believed that our soul is made of the very substance of God. It is this part of our being that Julian referred to as our "higher" nature. At the same time, however, humans also have a "lower" nature that Julian referred to as our "sensuality." Julian used this term to describe "all of our psychology and physicality as individual human beings: our capacities for perception in sight, hearing, touch, and so on, our whole sensory consciousness and our capacity for action. In other words, sensuality refers to our existence as psychosomatic beings in a physical world . . . Our substance is the substance of being itself: our sensuality individuates us, making each of us one among many beings . . . sensuality relates to the union of consciousness with embodiment." The rupture within humans between substance and sensuality, between our higher and lower natures, came about through Adam's sin (loss of innocence and introjections of fear in humanity's relationship with the Creator) which Julian understood as "the greatest harm that was ever done or ever shall be, until the world ends." (p. 118-119).

Fear is embedded deep down in our bones as both burden and gift. Burden because it overwhelms us with terror when we feel threatened. Gift because it freezes and stops us from encountering perceived harm. In our psyche, the twin sister of fear is trust. Trust melts fear. It enables us to turn outward and make attachments that make us feel safe. Trust, like fear, is essential to our survival. Why then, in our faith tradition, do we view them as gifts that need redeeming by God? Why can't trust and fear be left on their own to do the job they are suppose to



do? Faith's answer to this question goes something like this: Left on their own, fear and trust end up getting fooled. Fear ends up being enslaved to the monsters of the night and trust ends up attaching itself to safety and pleasure that soon fades. When this happens, we end up looking like people colored by the seven deadly sins of pride, lust, sloth, anger, avarice, gluttony, and envy. Lent is the time for facing the specific nature of our fears, and for naming the things in which we place our trust. It's our time for turning and returning to the Almighty; for awe-filled fearing and trusting in God alone; and, for keeping tethered to the Lord. In Jesus' story, Mark tells us that Jesus' fear and trust kept him tethered to God with the help of angels who ministered to him.

Temptation is the psychological force that arises within the needs of the ego whenever fear pulls the rug of faith out from under our feet. Like Jesus, when our time of temptation comes, we could use an angel or two to minister to us to keep us tethered to God. One such angel for us might be Gary Zukaz who asks in his self-help book: "How many times have you been tempted today by food? Alcohol? Shopping? Phone calls? Facebook posts? Behind every temptation is the same dynamic. It's easy to think of a temptation as a trap, but it's just the opposite. Temptation is a compassionate gift: an opportunity to learn without creating negative consequences. Temptation is like a magnet. It brings negative things to the surface---and it allows you to do something about it. Temptation is an invitation to get to know yourself. You can think of temptation as providing you with a "dress rehearsal." When you're tempted you can play out in your mind what would happen if you indulge. Once you visualize what would happen if you snack on some chips, smoke a cigarette, buy those shoes, plan vengeful payback, you can make a choice to resist or act out. The benefit of playing this out in your mind is that you don't create any negative consequences if you choose to resist. Only if you act on your temptation, have you created negative consequences for yourself and others." (Temptation by Gary Zukaz, adapted)

According to Zukaz, dress rehearsals of thinking and imagination can cut down on our negative actions towards our self and others. He suggests that one of the best ways to resist is to challenge a temptation by asking yourself a series of questions like: Does this bring me genuine power? Will this make me more loving? Will this make me more whole? The payoff to challenging a temptation, concluded Zukaz, is an empowered self. Temptation is an invitation to get to know yourself. It is also an invitation to get to know God.

Knowing God is the key to keeping tethered to our Creator. To know God, is to both fear and trust God. When the flood was over, God set a bow in the clouds and said that 'it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth . . . when the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my everlasting covenant.' The bow likely refers to God's bow (and arrows) as a weapon of war, hostility, and destructiveness. That the bow is suspended in the sky means that God has made a gesture of disarmament, has hung up the primary weapon, and now has no intention of being an aggressor or adversary. This demobilized weapon of God is a gesture of peace and reconciliation. God intends to be at peace with the world' (Texts for Preaching, 192-193). When the Creator turned the military bow upside down and said, "never again!" God's bow made the world safe. Not safe from the onslaught of another mother nature flood, or tornado, or terrorist attack, but safe from the Almighty's anger against human sin. God's bow redeemed the power of instinctual fear in quivering souls by disarming it's force with the greater power of trust in the Lord.

Prayer. Those of us who walk along this road do so reluctantly. Lent is not our favorite time of the year. We'd rather be more active—planning and scurrying around. Besides we don't know what to do with piousness and prayer. Perhaps we're afraid to have time to think, for thoughts come unbidden. Perhaps we're afraid to face our future knowing our past. Give us the courage, O God, to hear your word and to read our living into it. Give us the trust to know we're forgiven, and give us the faith to take up our lives and walk. Amen.