

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen. The word of God that we consider today is from Genesis 9: *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.*

I feel like I'm forgetting something...Siri, can you read me my reminders for today? ...Smartphones, calendars, date books, post-its, notes written on our hands, shopping lists, alarms, or even strings tied to our fingers. These are just some of the ways we remind ourselves of things. **We are a memory-impaired bunch.** Or maybe I'm just speaking for myself. If I lost this [phone] I would have no idea where I'm supposed to be or what I'm supposed to do.

People of my generation and younger especially have trouble with memory. We let Siri remember everything for us. In the past, we actually had to remember things on our own. You used to have to remember people's phone numbers. When's the last time you actually memorized a phone number? Now we just enter the number in our phones and let the phone worry about it. I don't even know my own mother's phone number by heart! Confirmands used to memorize bible verses and hymns, not to mention the *whole* of Luther's catechism. Kids now have a much harder time memorizing things, in part, I think, because of our reliance on devices and tricks to jog our memories. **We all need reminders.** The younger generation has poor memory because we don't need to remember things anymore. The older generation has poor memory because their memories are beginning to weaken with age. Our memories are imperfect.

But what about God's memory? We would assume that God does not suffer from memory lapses. No one would expect to find heaven littered with Post-it notes. Nobody thinks God needs to have Siri remind him when Judgment Day is. He just knows. He is omniscient – all-knowing, which means by definition he never forgets. That's what makes this text from Genesis so strange. God says he sets the rainbow in the sky as a reminder – not for us, but for *him!* It is there to remind him of his covenant, his promise never again to wipe out all life on earth by means of a flood. It is a reminder to God to be gracious and merciful to us. (Which makes the use of the rainbow flag very ironic!) Luther remarks that if it weren't for this promise, and *"if [God] wanted to punish evil, there would be need daily of a new flood."* The rainbow is a sign of God's peace – if you think of it as a bow, as in bow and arrow, which way would the arrow be pointed? Not towards the earth but away from it!

But does God really need a reminder? Does he actually forget? The Lord says in the Prophet Isaiah, *"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."* So it would seem that God is actually capable of forgetting something. But God's forgetting is not like our forgetting. When God forgets our sins for the sake of Christ, he does not have a memory lapse. He does not forget by accident

like we so often do but he forgets deliberately, choosing of *his own will* not to bring our sins to mind when we stand before him on the day of judgment. So when God says he will *remember* his covenant when he sees the rainbow, that doesn't mean he would forget his covenant without it. It's not as though God wakes up and goes, "Hmm. Lots of sin down there. I think I'll destroy the world with a flood...oh a rainbow! [snap] That's right! I promised I wouldn't do that again!" God's memory is perfect. He always remembers his covenant; his promises never fail.

In fact, *we* are the ones who forget the covenants God makes with us. That's why there was a flood to begin with. We forgot God. We forgot his law even as it was written on our hearts from the very beginning. Even Christians forget that God has made a covenant with us and that we are to walk not in darkness but as children of light. And no matter how many reminders we surround ourselves with, we still manage to forget God's promises. That's why when God makes a promise it's unconditional. Even if we forget to keep the covenant, God always remembers. His covenant with Noah was unilateral – it didn't require Noah to accept it or agree to it. How do we know? Because this covenant was not only with Noah but with every living creature on the earth – and as far as I know, dogs, sharks and trees do not assent to covenants.

So when we see a rainbow...in spite of what some have made it to mean...it is a reminder to us to fear and trust God. He has the ability and the right to judge the world by flood but he has made a trustworthy pledge to be merciful. The rainbow is a sign that reminds us we have escaped punishment by flood. But we have a still greater sign that reminds us God will also spare us from punishment by fire. The cross is a sign and a constant reminder of God's prevailing mercy. When God looks upon his only Son on the cross, he remembers the covenant he made with us never to hold our sins against us. There on the cross, Jesus endured the punishment for all our sins.

Of course God always remembers his covenant. We're the ones who need all the reminders. The cross is a reminder to us that God is for us and that he is mindful of the promises he made to us. Just as we use a multitude of reminders in our everyday lives, so God reminds *us* of the cross often. When we are baptized, the sign of the cross is first traced upon us. It links us to Jesus' death. That's why we are instructed to make the sign of the cross *in remembrance* of our baptism. When we make the sign of the cross, it's a little reminder to us that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and he is the one who protects us from all evil. Jesus has also instructed Christians to keep the Lord's Supper *in remembrance* of him. The Eucharist is another reminder to us. The body that died on the cross to save us is the same body that we eat. The blood that was shed from the cross for our salvation is the same blood that we drink. Every time we do, we are reminded that our sins are truly forgiven by Jesus' sacrifice of his body and his blood for us. We also think of that man who pleaded, "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" Along with the thief who was crucified alongside Jesus, we are given the promise of paradise from the cross.

So, dear Christians, **throughout life's ups and downs remember God's covenant with you.** Where do you record your reminders? Is the dashboard of your car covered with sticky notes? Add one that reminds you

Jesus died for you. Tell Siri to remind you that you are a redeemed child of God. Hang crosses in places where you always look so that you will always have that reminder before you. Make the sign of the cross when you wake and when you lie down. You can even write it on your hands if you want, but remember that God has already written you on his. Isaiah records:

*Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me" "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will **not forget** you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.*

Indeed, the Lord has graven us onto his palms with nails. **Remember** that the Lord will never forget you.

AMEN.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.