

# **God Saves Us By Meeting Us Where We Are**

*That the Word Might be Saved 1*

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Genesis 9:-8-17, Mark 1:9-15

## **Introduction**

Today we begin a new sermon series for Lent called “that the world might be saved.” Most of us are familiar with the verse John 3:16 which says, “

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

It’s a truly powerful verse that in one verse tells so much about God’s love and sacrifice on our behalf. There’s a reason that folks have posted this at football games and the like. Our Lenten theme is taken from the verse that follows it – which, while is less well known, is equally powerful. Here’s what John 3:17 says,

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

We will see how powerful a notion this is – that Jesus does not come to condemn but to save the world that God created to be good. Over the next few weeks, we will be looking in scripture at the various ways that God seeks to love and save you, and me, everyone we know and indeed, the whole world.

Let’s get started.

## **Noah After the Flood**

In the flood story, Noah and his family are also on the edge, they’ve just gone through a life-threatening experience, one in which their homes have been destroyed, their land fundamentally altered. Their communities have vanished in the waters. Yet they have survived along with the animals on the Ark. In response for their lives being saved, Noah builds an altar to God, and God offers back to him a striking covenant.

This first covenant is one that God makes with humanity, and all the living things on earth. In this beautiful statement of coming into relationship with humanity, God uses key words over and over as he makes his promises.

First is the word covenant. God establishes a covenant – that is, a relationship with boundaries, with humanity and living things. God has been the creator up until now, but in this passage the story of God and humanity changes – and this idea of covenant will grow and change throughout the Bible, but this much will never change – God will love us and protect us.

The second key word is sign: It's the image of the rainbow that is set in the sky – a sign of remembering that this all powerful, all knowing God has decided to invest in us, humanity, made in the image of God.

This makes me think of that amazing photograph of Faith with the rainbow arching over it, and what a powerful message that is going back to the first covenant here in Genesis. God makes promises for life, and that leads to the third key word in this scripture: remember.

God wants us to remember this life-giving covenant, to seal it to our hearts and know that we are in relationship with God. Remember this, God says.

Rachel Naomi Remen writes of a CEO of a major company who is in prayer following treatment for prostate cancer. He is in morning meditation when all of a sudden he realizes, in his own words, "I am shocked to have discovered this morning that I am the only me there is. . . I am handmade. Less than perfect but more a work of creation than a product of technology."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, we are the created creatures blown from the breath and word of God, yet fashioned from the very earth, as we remembered on Ash Wednesday a few days ago. When God says in Genesis 1: "let us make humankind in our own image" it is our reminder that our journey of life is discovering how we each embrace that image. The very use of the plural pronoun for God (in the "us") should make us aware that this is no simple uniform stamp on who we are, or how we are to be.

### **Mark – the beloved, and we in the image**

Our other story, the story of Jesus baptism in Mark, uses another sign to show us that God yearns to meet us where we are. In Jesus coming down to earth, we see God finding a new way to bring God's people to fully abundant and eternal life.

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, 286.

The baptism of Jesus aligns him with John, the one baptizing, who brought messages to those on the edges, the ones living in the wilderness. God is delighted by Jesus here – he calls him “the beloved” and says he is “well-pleased.”

Jesus joins with us when we find ourselves on the edges too – perhaps with a faith crisis, or challenges of life with the pandemic, or the loss of a loved one, no matter how expected it might have been. In the middle of these life challenges it can feel pretty lonely – and that the world is judging us because we may not be handling things so well. That can start us feeling ashamed and we can often isolate even more.

It’s here on the edges that Jesus comes to us and says, “It’s ok, you are still loved. Stay with me a while, and you will find your way back to full life.” Jesus promises to meet us here and watch over us through the wilderness of our lives.

Remember how I said our theme is “that the world might be saved?” That’s because his gift is not just to come to **our** homes and raise **us** up to be who we are, but to bring this same gift and the same message to **all** the world – to **all** homes, **all** villages, all families and people like us, of day-to-day need and fear and brokenness.

Jesus is with them too – wherever, whoever and however they are. Maybe behind their couch. In their closet as they come out of it, and in their scary places that they’re afraid to enter. In the midst of their pain and sorrow, on their sickbed or deathbed. Ready to raise them up to new life, if only someone might open the door, make an introduction, and help the miracle of the kingdom of God happen there, too.

The question for us is how each us, when God’s love comes to us where we are, and as we are, to help us be who we are, begin to be serving Jesus and the miracle of God’s kingdom around us.

This is why he’s come to us. It’s the same reason he comes to everyone. To raise us all, where we are and as we are able, into the life and the living of God’s kingdom.

Amen.