

Sermon: Symbol #6 -The Rainbow Genesis 9:8-17 Revelation 4:2-4

**Pride Sunday, August 28, 2022 Rev Steve Clifton- Rideau Park United Church,
Ottawa ON**



I was leading a Bible Study in the hall of the first church I served. We were deep in conversation when our most senior participant exclaimed, stood up and walked outside. Naturally, everyone paused, and then not sure what else to do we decided to follow her outside. In the sky there was a brilliant dazzling rainbow. Our eldest member told us that she had spotted it out the church window. She said that we would have more Bible studies, but we might never see as beautiful a rainbow again.

Rainbows are like that. Most of us, most of the time, stop for a moment to take in a rainbow. There are bright rainbows, double rainbows, rainbows that circle the sun, small bits of rainbow light that form in mist or by a waterfall...

We know what rainbows are.... They are light refracted through watery or icy prisms – full light broken down into a spectrum of color...red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet...

Rainbows are scientifically explicable, and they are arrestingly beautiful.

Rainbows are also symbols- a natural occurrence that is imbued with meaning, in song, poetry, myth and Scripture...

In the life of faith, we use symbols. Symbols can wordlessly communicate a depth of meaning. They are a shorthand to communicate a bigger story, a deeper reality. Over summer months we have been reflecting on symbols of faith.



- We have looked at one of the earliest symbols of our tradition, a first century spoked wheel in which is hidden the name of Jesus, which symbolically and simply communicates the great commandment to love God and neighbor.
- The boat is an old and common symbol that speaks of Christian community -----
- Celtic High crosses, symbols that carry the story of God's love from Creation to the end of things, carved in stone
- The table - they are found in many churches in a prominent place. The table has a function but carries a deeper meaning
- Last week we considered the baptismal font.

Each symbol places a different emphasis on the life of faith. ; symbols lift up and put the emphasis on other a unique dimension of our faith tradition.



So today.... The rainbow.

Some symbols that we use in our faith tradition are also employed as symbols beyond it. In other cultures, the rainbow has a meaning. In Greek and in Norse mythology rainbows are connections between the divine world and the earthly realm.

When a beloved pet passes away, we say they have gone over the rainbow bridge.



Rainbows in our culture are a sign of hope. Rainbows appear after a storm and so they point to a time when storm and tumult have passed. In the early months of the COVID pandemic, rainbows were posted in windows, on fences, a reminder of better days to come.

Rainbows may be a sign of peace- all the colours, all the diversity of things, together, making something beautiful.



Rainbows are also found in the story of Scripture. Most notably, there is the story in Genesis 9. The rain stops, the flood recedes, and God places a rainbow in the sky as a sign of a covenant promise, as a reminder of God's mercy towards all that God created.

And the rainbow appears again, in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel...The prophet has a vision of the Holy One in heaven, One who is surrounded by a bright rainbow of colour. The Revelation to John has a rainbow vision too where again the Holy one enthroned over all things is encircled with a rainbow of light.

The rainbow image in Scripture reminds us of the nature of God- God has made a promise to show love, kindness, and mercy... So, when we see a rainbow, it may speak to hope, and it might remind us of God who is full of love, kindness and mercy.



This is Capital Pride Sunday and it's a day draped in rainbows. The rainbow pride flag was first unfurled in 1978 during San Francisco's Gay Freedom Day and the rainbow today is found wherever people or communities or organizations want to proclaim their support for and solidarity with those in the 2SLGBTQ community. The rainbow is a shorthand for the embrace of inclusion, for advocacy of the dignity of all people inclusive of gender identity or sexuality.



We have rainbow banners on our church exterior, a symbol to tell our community that as an Affirming ministry, we welcome everyone. And we will carry rainbow colors in the Capital Pride parade this afternoon, carrying that symbol of inclusive love with us as we go.

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When my son was a preschooler, he loved the story of Noah's Ark. We had Noah story books and coloring books and artwork. His grandmother built him an ark of wood that was filled with toy animals two by two.

One summer when he was quite young a tornado passed by close to where we lived. It was a crazy storm with powerful winds and so much rain. The storm hit fast, and our windows were open, and we had water running down a hallway in our house. It was scary. But my son knew the story of Noah, his favorite story. God promised not to flood the earth (or his house). He remembered the rainbow, the promise that God was good. And kind. And that helped him weather the wind and rain.



On this Capital Pride Sunday, when we are surrounded by rainbows, may this symbol fill us with hope, for a better world for all Gods people, May the symbol speak of peace-a celebration of the diversity God made shining together in beauty and harmony. May the rainbow also remind us of the God who promises love over judgment, who made a covenant of grace and kindness to all.



Title: The Rainbow Blessing

May the blessing of the red sun as it sinks below the horizon be yours.

May the blessing of orange, the colour of flame and hearth be yours.

May the blessing of the wild, green earth and all life be yours.

May the blessing of the blue sea and wind which calls forth waves upon it be yours.

May the blessing of indigo, the twilight colour of change and coolness be yours.

May the blessing of violet, the colour of majesty and might be yours.

And may all the colourful blessings of the God Of The Rainbow be upon you and yours, now and always. (Tadhg Jonathan)