Our Bible story for today is the story of a little family beginning again.

Beginning after the devastation,

after the ruin,

after all land marks and market places,

all fields and schools,

all meadows and worship steeples are gone.

The new beginning has to be made without

the laughter of friends

or plates of cookies from neighbors

or text messages from cousins.

The new beginning has to be made while the land is still quite barren

and the animals are still quite hungry

and the grief is still so very, very raw.

Ah, but our Bible story for today is also the story of God beginning again;

beginning after the violence,

after the terror,

after the destruction.

The wild and dangerous warrior God,

the One who commands the raindrops

and squeezes the clouds,

and whips the waves with a single breath:

this Master Archer hangs the bow in the sky and says “Never again”.

God beginning again:

The sad and regretting God whose tears of distress flood cities apartments

and country chicken coops

and village taverns;

whose cries of grief thunder over

playgrounds and lion dens and goat herds;

whose dark despair is drawn like a curtain of hopelessness between the sun and the oak trees; between the moon and the vineyards;

between the stars and the owls.

This One begins again.

This time exchanging misery for mercy

and gloom for glory

and paints right into the tears with the full force of the sun seven ribbons of promise:

red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Seven reminders of “Never again”.

Is it possible for this little family

and this powerful God to start over together?

Noah seems to think so,

for the first thing he does upon exiting the ark is to worship God;

to build an altar to God and make a sacrifice.

God seems to think so.

For the first thing God does is to raise up a promise;

establish a covenant;

I suppose it could be said to make a treaty of sorts “Never again.

Never again will I destroy the whole earth with a flood.”

If we think God’s speech in Genesis 9 is meant chiefly for us, we are likely mistaken.

It seems to me that God’s discourse is for God.

The rainbow in the sky is for God to see;

for God to remember.

When I bring clouds over the earth

and the bow is seen in the clouds,

I will remember

I will remember

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.

Perhaps it could be said that both Noah and God know that they are not alone in this new beginning.

For it is not as Helen Reddy sang, “you and me against the world”.

No, it is God and you and me with the world,

with the earth, that is;

and with every living creature.

In this covenant God rebinds humanity and creation, reminding God’s self,

reminding Noah,

reminding the grasshoppers and the elephants,

the Red Woods and the rocks that we belong together; that what happens to anyone encircled by this covenant, happens to all.

When we begin again entering into covenant with both God and creation, we do well to

adapt a mind of awareness

and a spirit of thanksgiving

and a practice of remembering rightly

Are we aware?

I was not aware for example that from farm to fork, there is a 40% loss of food, which adds up to $165 billion in food being discarded every year.

And, by the way, it would only cost $30 billion dollars a year to feed everyone in the world.

Are we aware?

I was not aware that Ohioans rank 7th highest in the nation in the amount of trash in our landfills.

Are we aware?

Plastic takes up to 1,000 years to degrade in a landfill. Recycling plastic takes 88% less energy than making plastic from raw materials.

Enough plastic is thrown away each year to circle the Earth four times.

Americans throw away 35 billion plastic bottles every year.

Only about 25% of the plastic produced in the U.S. is recycled.

Are we thankful?

Given that we are in a covenant relationship that includes animals, I am not particularly thankful.

I had chicken on Friday night for supper and a sandwich with ham and sausage for lunch yesterday and though I thanked God for the food,

I did not thank the animals that sacrificed their lives so that I could eat.

If this sounds odd or silly to you, it may be because you are not Native American.

They believe each animal has a spirit and though it may be necessary to kill an animal in order to survive, we are to recognize that we are killing something sacred when we do so. The least we can do is say “thank you”.

Are we remembering rightly?

In order for God to fulfill God’s covenant to never again destroy the whole world with a flood,

God chose a sign that included rain.

A sign that would remind God that once God did just that: Once God did destroy the world with water.

What would your sign look like if you were trying to remember rightly?

Would it look like cotton ball where you had previously thrown a stone?

Would it sound like a word of blessing where previously you bullied and cursed?

Would it swing like a gate where before you had built a wall?

Pedro Reyes lives in the city of Culiacan, (Cool-i-a cahn) Mexico.

It has the highest rate of gun deaths in that nation. As in our nation, such deaths paralyze neighborhoods and governments and no particular progress is made on a national scale. But Reyes was not distracted by what was not being done, but rather he chose to make new signs from old destruction. Pedro asked residents to hand over their guns in exchange for a simple coupon that could be used to buy electronics or household appliances.

To some this would sound like a silly exercise; To Pedro it sounded like a calling.

Pedro collected 1527 guns. 40% of those were automatic weapons of military caliber.

The guns were transported to a military base and publically smashed with a steamroller.

Then they were melted down and transformed into 1527 shovels with wooden handles.

The new shovels were distributed to art institutes and schools where people in the community are now using them to plant a minimum of 1527 trees. (<http://www.trueactivist.com/artist-melts-1527-guns-and-turns-them-into-shovels-for-planting-trees/>)

God’s sign is the rainbow.

Pedro’s sign is the shovel.

What will be your sign?

Now may the spectrum of

God’s of Covenant Love

Shine before you in promise

Shine behind you in glory

And shine through you in tints of

Mystery, Honor, Joy and Peace

Now and for a thousand generations.