

SIGN OF THE RAINBOW

Genesis 9:18-27

You may remember from geometry that to figure the length of the perimeter of a circle, called the circumference, you multiply the distance across the circle, called the diameter, with something called “pi.” To figure out the area of the circle we multiply half of the diameter, called the radius, with “pi” again. “Pi” is often approximated as 3.14, but actually “pi” is a number that produces an infinite number of decimal places with no repetitions or patterns.

“Pi” was approximated by the ancient Egyptians in their building. The Greek scientist Archimedes came up with a formula using straight-sided shapes to represent a circle. For centuries mathematicians increased the accuracy of “pi” using this formula. The Persian astronomer [Jamshīd al-Kāshī](#) produced 9 [sexagesimal](#) digits, roughly the equivalent of 16 decimal digits, in 1424 using a polygon with 3×2^{28} sides, which stood as the world record for about 180 years. French mathematician [François Viète](#) in 1579 achieved 9 digits with a polygon of 3×2^{17} sides. Flemish mathematician [Adriaan van Roomen](#) arrived at 15 decimal places in 1593. In 1596, Dutch mathematician [Ludolph van Ceulen](#) reached 20 digits. Dutch scientist [Willebrord Snellius](#) reached 34 digits in 1621, and Austrian astronomer [Christoph Grienberger](#) arrived at 38 digits in 1630 using 10^{40} sides. But it took these men a lifetime to make these calculations.

Then in the 1600’s Isaac Newton came up with a way of solving “pi” using his new invention of calculus. His method made it easier to solve for “pi,” so that what took a lifetime could be done in months. Fast forward to the 20th century when computers came out. Now we can use Newton’s method to solve “pi” to millions of digits.

Newton’s method shows how starting new can simplify things in life. It can be so much easier to tear down an old house and build new from scratch than to try to renovate. During the Great Depression the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) rebuilt many historic sites. They built new from scratch, because there was a desperate need to put people to work even if it meant putting up structures that were not historically accurate. To do that would have made it impossible to employ people as the CCC did.

So it could seem with God and His creation. When God created the world in Genesis each day ends with the words, “And God saw that it was good.” But humans rebelled against God. This not only wrecked their lives, but all of creation. Paul in Romans 8 tells us:

Creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

The easy thing for God to do then would be to destroy the whole world and start over again.

In the story of Noah that seems to be what God did. He destroyed the earth with a flood, except for those kept alive on Noah's ark. Then He made this promise to Noah:

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 cloud, 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.

This is God's great promise not only to Noah, but to the whole earth. He will not destroy it again by a flood. But so what? God can destroy in any number of other ways—a giant asteroid, a giant solar flare, a comet. The way we are going as people who pollute our planet in so many ways, all He has to do is just simply let us do it for Him.

What this misses is the fact that God did not destroy it all. Noah and his family survived. They took on enough animals to repopulate the earth with them. What God was showing is that He was not going to do things the easy way. Instead of wiping the whole slate clean and starting from scratch, He is going to continue with us humans. He is not going to destroy evil by destroying humanity with it. Why not? For one simple reason—He loves us. The psalmist tells us that in His love God has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west. With our knowledge of our earth being round we know that distance is almost 25,000 miles, like traveling across the US 10 times. That's quite a bit. But the Psalmist who wrote those words believed the earth was flat. The east and west never meet—the distance is infinite like God's love for us.

In our Gospel lesson Jesus has just fed the 5,000. He had sent the disciples back across the Sea of Galilee in the evening. He noticed that they were having difficulty making headway in face of a strong wind. So He walked on the water to them. When they saw Him, they thought He was a ghost. He had to calm them down. Mark's Gospel says, "The disciples were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." It may not sound unreasonable to us that a man walking on water in the dark could seem to be a

ghost. We also have to understand that the Old Testament people were land people who thought that the bottom of the sea is where demons lived. But Jesus' miracles should have shown them that He wasn't just anyone. They pointed to Him being the Son of God. But as Mark writes, "Their hearts were hardened."

So are ours. Think of how we can dwell on things. We get jealous about someone and spend hours trying to see everything that person does in a negative light. We are part of a culture where the number one use of the internet is for pornography. We abuse the wonderful bodies God has given us by spending too much time sitting and eating too much of the wrong things. We get so used to those things that we become hardened, so conditioned to ignore what is wrong with us and not realize how it breaks our relationship with God.

But Jesus did not give up on the disciples. He doesn't give up on us either.

Science explains to us how we get rainbows. The same Newton who figured an easier way to calculate pi also used a prism to separate light and prove that regular white light is just a mixture of the colors that become visible when the prism separates them and produces a mini rainbow. In nature the rain serves as the prism separating the white light of the sun into the rainbows we see.

But the rainbow is still a sign to us of the God who made the universe, who gave us something for our science to investigate. We can learn many things about that universe, but never enough to replace God as the creator and sustainer. Newton's method does allow us to calculate pi more rapidly. But there is still no final solution to it. It is infinite—something even our fastest supercomputers can't solve. In the rainbow and in all of our amazing world we see a clear sign that God is there.

But we have an even clearer sign than the rainbow God gave to Noah. We not only know that God will not destroy the world and humanity and start all over. Instead in His Son Jesus He has restored us to Him. Jesus didn't give up on the disciples. He calmed the wind, got into the boat, and continued on with the disciples even when He knew they would flee from Him when He was arrested. But on the cross Jesus died with the sin that hardens our hearts. He rose on Easter to give new life so that the disciples and we can believe. Much greater than the sign of the rainbow, He has given us Baptism, which is not just symbolic, but the very real rebirth the Holy Spirit works in us. We have certain proof that God will not give up on us.