

Somewhere over the rainbow

By [Phyllis Kersten](#)

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For some Christians the most important characteristic of God is God's "unchangeableness," God the same--yesterday, today and forever.

For myself, I value those instances in which God changes God's mind, "repents," we might even say, of past behavior.

You know the story from Genesis.

First, God is "sorry" about creating humanity--because people's hearts and thoughts and imagination were inclined to evil "continually." And so--not out of anger, but out of "grief," we're told--God sends flood waters to "blot" out the flawed creation from the face of the earth, together with all the animals and birds and creepy, crawly things God made.

Afterwards, when God "made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters [of the flood] subsided," what God is hoping for is a "new" creation--God's creatures with new purified hearts and imaginations. But, sadly, God soon realizes that what was not changed when the waters of the flood receded was "the inclination of the human heart." God's intervention of flood waters did nothing to change people, nothing to stem the tide of corruption and wickedness and violence on earth.

So God changes. "Never again," God says. "Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

Instead God makes an "everlasting covenant" with the whole creation--Noah and his descendants, along with the descendants of every other living creature that walked,

*flew or crawled off the ark. These creatures can't seem to keep the limits I set for them, God seems to decide, to not shed one another's blood, to not mar this world I entrusted into their hands. So I will put "limits" on myself: to never again destroy the earth. And instead of tying a string around my finger to help me remember this everlasting covenant, I will set my bow in the clouds to remind myself of the limits I have placed on myself.*

Down through the ages God keeps sending messengers, prophets, to remind the people of this everlasting covenant. But nothing seems to work.

During Lent we Christians remember how God decided in Christ Jesus to limit Godself even more--the limit of self-emptying and taking on human form. God in Christ fulfills for us what it means for us flesh and blood creatures not only to live within our creaturely limits without sin, but also with limitless love and forgiveness for a world out of sync. Jesus even endures the ultimate limit, death itself, and overcomes it on our behalf.

God's suffering love for humanity and for this whole created world is surely seen most fully in Jesus. But it began already in Genesis, in God's grieving over the violence and evil and poor stewardship of the earth, which was our inclination already then.

Where is God calling us today to "limit" ourselves?