

First Sunday in Lent

February 21, 2021



Introduction

On Ash Wednesday the church began its journey toward baptismal immersion in the death and resurrection of Christ. This year, the Sundays in Lent lead us to focus on five covenants God makes in the Hebrew Scriptures and to use them as lenses through which to view baptism. The way God saved Noah's family in the flood connects with the way God saves us through the water of baptism. The baptismal covenant is made with us individually, but the new life we are given in baptism is for the sake of the whole world.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, Father, ✚ Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, the keeper of the covenant, the source of steadfast love, our rock and our redeemer. **Amen.**

God hears us when we cry, and draws us close in Jesus Christ.
Let us return to the one who is full of compassion.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Fountain of living water, **pour out your mercy over us.**
Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free.
Rebuild what we have ruined and mend what we have torn.
Wash us in your cleansing flood.
Make us alive in the Spirit to follow in the way of Jesus,
as healers and restorers of the world you so love. Amen.

Beloved, God's word never fails.
The promise rests on grace: by the saving love of Jesus Christ,
the wisdom and power of God, your sins are ✚ forgiven,
and God remembers them no more.
Journey in the way of Jesus. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn ELW # 320 /WOV # 657 *The Glory of These Forty Days*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Holy God, heavenly Father, in the waters of the flood you saved the chosen, and in the wilderness of temptation you protected your Son from sin. Renew us in the gift of baptism. May your holy angels be with us, that the wicked foe may have no power over us, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

Today's reading is the conclusion to the flood story. Because of human sin, God destroys the earth by flood, saving only Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark. Yet divine destruction gives way to divine commitment. As in the first creation, God blesses humanity and establishes a covenant with all creatures.

Read the text [here](#).

Psalmody: Psalm 25:1-10

¹To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

²**My God, I put my trust in you; let me not be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.**

³Let none who look to you be put to shame;
rather let those be put to shame who are treacherous.

⁴**Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths.**

⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation;
in you have I trusted all the day long.

⁶**Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.**

⁷Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;
remember me according to your steadfast love
and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.

⁸**You are gracious and upright, O LORD;
therefore you teach sinners in your way.**

⁹You lead the lowly in justice and teach the lowly your way.

¹⁰All your paths, O LORD, are steadfast love and faithfulness
to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.

Gospel: Mark 1:9-15

The Spirit that comes upon Jesus at his baptism sustains him when he is tested by Satan so that he might proclaim the good news of God's reign.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Our text for the first Sunday in Lent reminds us of God's promises. The promise of an everlasting covenant between God and the people of God. A promise that is fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, the son born of Mary and baptized by John in the river Jordan.

Mark begins this Gospel account, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." We are told in the very first sentence who this Jesus person is – he is the Son of God, the Christ, the promised Messiah, the savior of God's chosen people. Mark then introduces Jesus by way of John, and then reminds us that Jesus is the Son of God, "the Beloved."

So, we might wonder why, after 11 verses, Mark gives us a very short account of the temptation of Jesus before telling us, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news." Why move so quickly to this point?

As we know, the vast majority of scholars believe that Mark is the first gospel account, written around the year 70 AD, just after the fall of Jerusalem. Mark's gospel is written in a very precise way, leaving out what Matthew and Luke add to the story. We do not know if it is because Mark did not think the other information was not important, or because it came from a source that Mark was not aware of.

What we do know is that Mark wasted no time with birth narratives, or childhood stories of Jesus, or even family trees that tell why Jesus is the Messiah. Mark just tells us he is and goes on to tell us about Jesus and his ministry.

We begin with the baptism of Jesus, not because Jesus needed to be baptized, or because he needed to repent of anything, but so that God could announce that Jesus is his Son, the Beloved. In that announcement, we hear a word that is only used twice in Mark's gospel. The word "*schizos*" means to tear apart. In Mark 1:10, we hear that the heavens are torn apart and the voice of God tells us who Jesus is. In Mark 15:38, we hear that the veil of the temple is torn apart.

In both cases, we are hearing of something extraordinary – God is tearing open barriers, and nothing will ever be the same again. God is coming down to us in a new and different way, to keep the promise of the covenant.

Mark's gospel, and the ministry of Jesus, is all about the kingdom of God coming near, as Jesus shows us God's love as he heals, as he drives out demons, as he raises the dead, as he feeds the crowds, and even as he goes to the cross. The kingdom of God has come near – that reminder of God's promise to Noah and the rainbow, the reminder of the psalmist who writes, "Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love, for they are from everlasting." (25:6)

As we begin the season of Lent, the news is bad. The pandemic continues, the weather is bringing death and destruction around the world, and good news seems to be hard to find. During this Lenten season, I invite you to hear the stories of the God who is always with us. Even during pandemics, and snowstorms, and arctic blasts, and even during our worst days, God is with us. God has promised to always be with us, to remember us, and to send his Son, the Christ, to be with us, and even to die for us.

As we hear the story of the baptism of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, we remember our baptism where we are given the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. God has claimed us, and called us by name, and promised to be with us always.

The season of Lent is a time to remember, a time to ponder - our relationship with God. As the psalmist reminds us, we are to trust in the Lord, to learn the ways of the Lord, and in return, we are promised that the Lord will not remember our transgressions, and will remember us with steadfast love. Believe in the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the Beloved. Amen.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 618 / LBW # 343 *Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

In Jesus your realm has come near to us in every place and time. Give your church throughout the world a spirit of humility and repentance; teach us to trust always in the good news of your salvation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have made a covenant of mercy with every living creature. Protect all the earth's creatures from destruction. Empower the work of biologists, conservationists, and science educators. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

All your paths are steadfast love and faithfulness. Direct the words and actions of leaders in our community and throughout the world, that they may maintain justice for the lowly. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Even in the wilderness you are with us. Walk alongside migrants and refugees crossing dangerous lands. Tend to those whose lives feel desolate. Give healing and strength to all who suffer, especially those we name now. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the covenant of baptism you claim us as beloved children. Nurture us in our baptismal identity and teach us to live within it for the sake of others. Strengthen this congregation's ministries of care and concern. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

In baptism you join us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We praise you for all those who have died trusting in your faithfulness. Bring us with them to the fullness of your reign. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 517/ LBW # 230 *Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ray Sipe.