

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. First Peter connects the way God saved Noah's family in the flood 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.

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 Saviour 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.

⁸God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹²God said, “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: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I 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. ¹⁶When 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.” ¹⁷God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Psalm 25:1-10

- ¹To | you, O LORD,
I lift | up my soul.
- ²My 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.
- ⁴Show 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.
- ⁶Remember, O LORD, your compas- | sion 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 good- | ness, O LORD.
- ⁸You are gracious and up- | right, O LORD;
therefore you teach sinners | in your way.
- ⁹You lead the low- | ly in justice
and teach the low- | ly your way.
- ¹⁰All your paths, O LORD, are steadfast | love and faithfulness
to those who keep your covenant and your | testimonies.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

As God acted through Christ's suffering and death to bring us to God, so God acts through baptism to save us from a sinful existence. This spiritual cleansing marks our new life in Christ.

¹⁸Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Gospel Reading: 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.

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Prayers of Intercession

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need, saying “hear us, O God,” and responding, “your mercy is great.”

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.

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.

A reflection for the First Sunday in Lent...

The Power of Water

Water is an integral part of the created order. Water sustains and fosters life; too little or too much water can end it. A glance at the news headlines points out the destructive power of water's presence or absence: In the United States alone, 2011 saw severe droughts afflict several parts of the country. On the opposite end of the spectrum, floods ravaged the Plains states in the spring and summer, displacing from their homes many people who live near rivers and streams. For those dwelling on or near the Eastern Seaboard, hurricane season is a tense time every year. Yet we need water as much or more than we need food, shelter, or the other "staples" of human life. Since ancient times we have established our communities near sources of water. We cannot survive long without it.

The tension between the saving and destructive powers of water fills today's lectionary readings. The waters of the flood overwhelmed the world in the days of Noah, yet 1 Peter reminds us that God delivered Noah and his family from death. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus only after his baptism by John, yet the Spirit immediately drives Jesus into the desert—a place defined by its lack of water. Through water and the word, in baptism our old, sinful self is put to death, and we are reborn as children of God. But the current that flows through these paradoxes is this: in death and life, in flood and drought, God remains faithful. As the psalmist reminds us, God's mercy and steadfast love "are from everlasting."

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