

# Sunday, February 21, 2021

## First Sunday in Lent, Year B

### 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.*

<sup>8</sup>God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>and 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. <sup>11</sup>I 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." <sup>12</sup>God 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: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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." <sup>17</sup>God 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: Psalm 25:1-10

*Your paths, O LORD, are steadfast love and faithfulness. (Ps. 25:10)*

<sup>1</sup>To | you, O LORD,  
I lift | up my soul.

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

<sup>3</sup>Let none who look to you be | put to shame;  
rather let those be put to shame | who are treacherous.

<sup>4</sup>**Show me your | ways, O LORD,  
and teach | me your paths. R**

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

<sup>6</sup>**Remember, O LORD, your compas- | sion and love,  
for they are from | everlasting.**

<sup>7</sup>Remember 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.

<sup>8</sup>**You are gracious and up- | right, O LORD;  
therefore you teach sinners | in your way. R**

<sup>9</sup>You lead the low- | ly in justice  
and teach the low- | ly your way.

<sup>10</sup>All your paths, O LORD, are steadfast | love and faithfulness  
to those who keep your covenant and your | testimonies. **R**

## **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.*

<sup>18</sup>Christ 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, <sup>19</sup>in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>who 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. <sup>21</sup>And 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, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

## **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.*

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And 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. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

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

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

## Sermon

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen

Mark verse 1, chapter 1: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God." And now in today's gospel which is just several verses later we hear Jesus' opening statement regarding his ministry: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

"The time is fulfilled." In other words, this is a defining moment. The times, as they say, are a'changing – a new direction is being set. Noah and his family lived through just such a time. The flood marked that time when divine destruction gave way to divine commitment. The rainbow became the defining symbol of the Lord's two-word promise – "Never again."

And in Mark's gospel, Jesus' baptism is a defining moment. This time, it isn't oceans of waters that flood from heaven, but rather the Holy Spirit coming down like a dove.

"The kingdom of God has come near." It is so near that it touches us. God is on the loose in the world, loving all of creation. When God says, "This is my Son," it's God's way of saying, "If you want to know me, get to know him."

"Repent." Repentance means changing one's direction – re-aligning it with new principles, new beliefs, new understandings, new objectives, new goals. Repentance can bring new options and new beginnings.

"Believe in the good news." Believe in the good news or gospel that Jesus preaches and teaches, the good news that is Jesus himself. Come to the One who gives life and love to all.

In one sense Mark's gospel, at least in the beginning, is somewhat like a Reader's Digest version of Matthew's and Luke's gospels. He seems to hit the highpoints, the major points, and then quickly moves on to make his point.

Jesus' temptations in the wilderness following his baptism is given great space elsewhere, but not in Mark. No, Mark wants to get to the point that after temptations in the wilderness for 40 days Jesus' ministry begins. Period. Mark wants us to recognize the beginning of Jesus' ministry as Jesus proclaims – "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

Now Mark can begin telling us about Jesus' ministry, the preliminaries are out of the way. It is now time to pay particular attention to what Jesus does and says. And, so we shall.

It was really only a few weeks ago that we heard about Jesus' baptism as we do yearly following the Epiphany. And now we have the story again, but once more, in a condensed version. Yet, for Mark the significant point is that God's voice came from

heaven and proclaimed: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mark wants to be sure to note that this baptism is of God. And further, Mark wants us to remember that from now on there is this loving connection between God and Jesus.

Now Jesus can move on to the wilderness and be tempted and then finally begin his public ministry.

There is a progression in Mark's gospel, as well as Matthew and Luke, that relates to us as well. First – baptism, then – temptations, then -ministry, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

I'm assuming that most of us were baptized as infants. I was, when I was a month old. And if so, it's hard to point directly to temptations, after all what does a baby or small child know and understand about temptation as it is described in scripture?

No, for most of us that comes along with growing up, maturing. Lord knows we were tempted by many things, many people, many situations as we grew into and out of our teen years and beyond. How did we do with being tempted? You don't have to answer that one out loud.

Temptations still abound. They never really disappear or go away. They are part of life as we live it day by day. And truly the temptations for Jesus never went away either. They were all around. Yet, Jesus' mindset was always focused on doing and being what he knew his Father commissioned him to be about, what he was born to do.

So, for Jesus and for us ministering comes with inherent danger of temptations all along the way. And just so, Jesus at the right moment dove headfirst into his public ministry, assuring everyone that this moment in time is different because it is now time to wake up, time to repent and believe in the one true God, who has been faithful to his people forever. It is time to understand God in a new way, a way that always leads with love, care, concern, mercy, grace, justice and peace.

And then Jesus walked from town to village proclaiming what God is like to all who would listen. Temptations and evil lurked not far away, but his mind was solely focused on doing the will of God that they at times were not even worthy of consideration. When he was confronted, he always stood his ground and never backed down. He squarely proclaimed how God would respond to the situation presented by his dissenters. His message was received with contempt as often as not, but he was always faithful to his central message concerning God. He wasn't bashful or shy. He didn't look for trouble, but never backed away from it either.

It all makes us wonder if Jesus knew the extent of what his ministry would entail before he began. Likely he did and as God's Son and servant he marched ahead without looking back, knowing he was doing his Father's will.

Now, the first Sunday in Lent, as we've begun our journey to Jerusalem and Holy Week, we can use this gospel text and do a bit of self-examination, one of the Lenten disciplines.

Specifically, today we can be introspective around the idea of ministry – our ministry. And yes, we all are called to be ministers of the gospel, those who proclaim the good news.

I have worshipped in congregations where the bulletin lists the pastor, the secretary and the ministers who are identified as the members. I have always liked that notion, and it is true, but I always wonder if all the members truly believe they are ministers in a real and meaningful way.

As ministers we know all about temptations and all that act as roadblocks and detours that play havoc with our good intentions to be proclaimers of the gospel, the good news. And yet, because we belong to God who gives us the words to say and the authorization to speak and act on his behalf, we, like Jesus, can march ahead in confidence that our words and actions will be received as the good news that they are.

How many people will receive us and our ministry with a positive attitude we do not know, nor should we be concerned. It is said that on a Sunday following worship Luther went to the local pub. While there someone asked him if he shouldn't be saving souls. His response was that the Holy Spirit has to have something to do. Meaning, of course, that we all have our part to play in the larger scheme of proclaiming the good news.

As ministers we know that God's word is needed in nearly all of our conversations at this moment in time. Decades ago, many folks wore bracelets with the slogan: What would Jesus do? While the bracelets have gone out of fashion, the question hasn't and can daily be a nudge for us to consciously be a minister of and for God. Whatever it is that we believe Jesus would do or say in the situations we find ourselves - it would behoove us to say or do exactly that.

The bottom line for us as for Jesus is that this world of ours, with all its faults and worries, needs to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus set out and daily spoke about God in ways that captivated people and caused a great many people to follow Jesus and understanding God in new ways – ways that gave them hope not just for the future but for the present.

May each of us imitate Jesus' ministry.

Thanks be to God.

Amen

## Prayers of Intercession

*The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.*

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 (*especially . . . here local environmental concerns may be named*). 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*). 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 (*especially*). 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.**