

Scripture Readings and Sermon

February 21, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Genesis 9:8-17 ([Youtube Lectionary Study Video](#))

While most people focus on the building of the Ark or the animals gathering together in pairs, the most miraculous point of the Noah story is the covenant. It was not uncommon to have deliverance stories or even covenants between a god and a people but this covenant was between God and all of creation. "I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature." This is just one aspect of the covenant that is unique. It was God who initiated the covenant rather than a person seeking a blessing. Not only does God initiate the covenant but God does not require any conditions. God has given creation a promise with no expectations placed upon creation. This is the truly miraculous nature of the Noah story, not the flood or the animals but God's merciful promise. In no other religion of the time was there a god who cared so much for creation that they limited their own power.

Genesis 9:13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

In a time when the bow was one of the most powerful weapons, what does it mean that God hung up His bow?

What does peace look like for you? Power? Safety? Faith?

Is peace found in the strength of people or the strength of God?

What does it mean that the covenant is with the earth?

What does this story have to do with Lent?

Commentary on Mark 1:9-15 ([Youtube Lectionary Study Video](#))

After encountering God at Mt. Horeb, Elijah heads back to the land of Israel and encounters Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21). While Elisha is in the background, Elijah has his final confrontation with Ahab and Jezebel in argument over Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21). The story has some echoes of the story of David and Bathsheba. Ahab is urged by Jezebel to take what is not his and then kill to cover it up. Like David, Ahab repents while Jezebel bides her time. Because Ahab repents, God's wrath is shifted to Ahaziah (Ahab's son) who like his mother worships other gods which once again leads to a show down between Elijah and the leader of Israel (2 Kings 1). After this final show down, Elijah goes to be with God and asks Elisha to stay behind. The procession from Bethel to Jericho to Gilgal and then to "east" of the Jordan is the reverse trip that Joshua made when leading Israel into the Promised Land (Joshua 1-8). It was "east" of the Jordan that "Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land" (Deuteronomy 34:1) Elijah, like Moses, passed on leadership of the people to the next generation. For Moses, this next generation was Joshua and for Elijah it was Elisha. While most people view Moses as a deliverer, Deuteronomy states "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses." (34:10) In this simple passage, both Elijah and Moses as well as their "disciples" are represented. The insistence of Elisha on following Elijah three times is also similar to Ruth following Naomi (Ruth 1:8-16). All of these parallels are meant to point out to the reader that Elisha will become a great prophet and leader.

2 Kings 2:5 And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

Have you ever been in a situation where you know what will happen but can not turn away?

Why did you stay? Was it too tragic or too beautiful?

Have you ever experienced a holy time when the only true response is silence?
Did you hear God in that silence?
When was the last time you encountered God in the silence?

Commentary on 1 Peter 3:18-22 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

This passage of scripture contains one of the most controversial statements in the New Testament, "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all". Those three little words "once for all" had enormous implications for the early Church. "Once" meant that no more sacrifices were needed for forgiveness. The Temple had become redundant with the crucifixion of Christ. "For All" extended God's salvation beyond the Jewish people and beyond even the pale of death to reach those before and outside of the covenants. Peter states that Jesus, upon his death, visited the "spirits in prison" who died during the flood. These spirits were viewed as by the religious teachers of the day as outside of God's mercy. With these three little words, "once for all", Peter announced that Jesus' death and resurrection completely changed the theology of the day. It is because of "once" that many Protestant churches no longer call the table an "altar" (which is used for sacrifices) but a Table of Remembrance.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all
Does all mean people or sins?
If it means sin, does that mean that you are never beyond Christ's forgiveness?
If you are never beyond forgiveness, what about your neighbor or your enemy?
Did Christ die for those we call dictators and terrorists?
If Christ went to those in the days of Noah, does that mean God wants people of all
faiths?
How does this challenge your view of the world?

Sermon "Life in the Wilderness" (*[Sermon Video](#)*)

It is said that at times we live in a "dog eat dog" world. I'm not sure about Darwin's logic behind evolution but I must agree with his theory of "survival of the fittest". This theory reveals the true cost of sin upon humanity and the world. Rather than loving one another as children of God, we often struggle with one another to see who can get the job, parking place, spouse, etc. At the orientation of the university my daughter was accepted in for the fall of 2021, they stated that out of 9,000 applications only 624 were selected. This is just one example out of many in which society places us against one another to see if the fittest will survive. Capitalism is founded upon this basic understanding of the sinful human nature which is why it has proven so successful with appropriate regulations. For wherever there is sin, then there must be law so that the dogs don't eat everything.

In the midst of this world of competition and wild animals, we are tempted by Satan and waited on by angels. God sends us angels as a means of God's grace. Strangers who lend a helping hand for no apparent reason. Friends who call in the middle of a hard freeze just to check if we need a warm meal or a place to stay. People who tell us where the ark is and how to get on board. In the middle of the wilderness of life, we entertain angels often without knowing it. And sometimes, God calls on us to be an unknowing angel to someone else. There is no way of knowing how a kind word or gesture can transform a person's day.

These kind words are especially needed when we are being sorely tested. The position of 'satan' in Hebrew is the role of the prosecutor. The prosecutor is the one who breaks down the testimony of the witness. As children of God and followers of Jesus, we proclaim obedience to God through the lordship of Jesus. But is Jesus really the lord of our everyday life? Do we fall into the trap of worshipping human leaders, institutions, and celebrities? Do we place God's will above our own physical needs and wants? When we see someone like Noah, do we pay attention or just write them off as another fanatic? Satan places us in situations where we have to make a choice about whether or not

God is really in charge of our lives and we often, as Paul says, "fall short". It is when we are about to fall that we need more angels than wild beasts.

The good news is that Jesus walked through the wilderness. He has made a path that is straight although narrow. Jesus not only has made the path but will walk the path with us as we carry the Word in our hearts. For all who have strayed, Christ suffered once for all so that all may make the journey back home. As we begin our Lenten journey, let us act more like angels than wild beasts and let us keep our eyes on Jesus rather than being led astray by Satan.