

Lent 1B. February 18, 2018. Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA. Genesis 9:8-17 (Noah and the Ark), I Peter 3:18-22, Mark 1:9-15.

9 In 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.'

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

14 Now 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.'

She felt terrible. Too busy, too full of her importance, she overlooked the questions on the child's face, missed the hurt and the hope, spoke carelessly – and regretted it later.

He felt terrible too. He was in such a financial mess. The interest on the loans was horrible. Writing the check was so easy. His boss never noticed. The audit never noticed. But he regretted it.

The kids dallied on the bridge, talking about jumping. Some were really scared; others laughed. But one went back later and thought long and hard about the consequences. Would he regret it? Who would care?

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“Lead us not into temptation,” we pray. Better translated: “Save us from the time of trial” or “keep us from the hard test.” Luther proclaimed, “God indeed tempts no one.” But the testing comes so quickly and easily: the careless words, the financial dishonesty, the idea of ending it all. So easily they come and so easily they can overpower our personal resources of kindness, honesty, self-respect, and love for others. Luther again, “we ask in this prayer that God would preserve and keep us, so that...we may finally prevail and gain the victory.”

Maybe today, on the first Sunday of Lent, we might look ahead to Jesus' last day in front of Pontius Pilate. Remember how when Jesus was brought out robed in purple and wearing a crown of thorns, Pilate remarked, “Behold the man!” Today we look at Jesus some 3 years earlier. He has been baptized; he enters the wilderness, the desert, to fast and pray. “Behold the man!” “Behold the man who was tested as we are.” Tested as we are, he came to understand what we

face. Tested as we are, he came to appreciate the relief offered by angels when the time of trial is past.

Matthew and Luke describe the tests as suggestions to turn stones to bread, jump off the temple to be rescued by angels, and gain power over all the nations by embracing the dark side. In other words, Jesus faced the opportunity to gain riches – free bread! – to gain fame by the angel-rescue, and to gain power. Who wouldn't want this diabolical trinity? In every case Jesus confronts the challenge to his identity as Son of God by clinging to the word of God as he knew it from scripture. His final word to the challenger was, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

In the great stories of the Hebrew scriptures, we read of Adam and Eve. The forebears of us all lost their place in paradise because they wanted to be like God, to know good and evil. We read of Noah today. The man who, with family and animals, was saved from death by drowning. God made a COVENANT with Noah and his descendants: a promise sealed by the rainbow that God would not allow a flood to destroy all the earth. Adam failed. Noah failed when he left the ark and planted vineyards and shamed his family by his drunkenness. We fail in caring for the earth, as already floods – of our own making -- creep over shorelines, erode ice in the Arctic, and threaten to obliterate inhabited islands.

In today's brief passage from the Gospel of Mark we travel with Jesus from his Baptism by John. We hear God affirm that Jesus is Beloved. We follow his wilderness journey and the care he received from ANGELS (!). We grieve the tragedy of John's arrest – which will lead to John's death. Jesus begins his ministry and continues John's call to repentance. He preaches the Good News of forgiveness, healing and blessing. It's a short summary of our journeys as well.

We begin with our Baptism and God's affirmation of love for us; we have no choice but to be driven into the wilderness of reality: the reality of temptation, of death, of loss. In that wilderness, that desert, we are sustained by ANGELS and propelled forward into the world where we are called to forgive, to heal, to bless.

The great difference is that Jesus completed the walk with God that Adam came to fear, that Noah could not fulfill, that you and I seek. **Jesus fulfilled the covenant that God made with humanity.**

We call Jesus the New Adam, the New Noah, the CHRIST who marches before us through life to death to life. He overcomes the times of testing, challenges the dark

side of trials, overcomes evil with good. When we wash our faces in the morning, we do not use the water of chaos or flood, but the water of remembrance that we are God's children. We are meant to "walk wet," remembering our Baptism, connected with Jesus all our days, so that when God looks at us, God sees not the sins and brokenness, but the faithfulness of Jesus. Thus, the great story of God's covenant continues.

When we "behold the man" Jesus, we remember how he did something very different with wine than our forebear Noah did. Jesus took the cup. "This is the NEW COVENANT in my blood," he said, "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

When we look at ourselves, we may regret, but we do not despair. Forgiven, we forgive. Chastened, we look to God for strength to overcome the next time of trial, the next test of our memory of who we are and whose we are: children of the same heavenly father, sisters and brothers of the same Jesus.

Perhaps we seek to make amends. May God help us with that challenge, for with many of our shortcomings, there are amends to make. For those that have no channel for amends, we simply fall to our knees and pray for the offended, for those against whom we have sinned, and we beg to do better the next time. God's grace offers us the hope and the courage for such a "next time."

The readings today are hopeful. Realistic, and hopeful. The rainbows we see inspire us with the memory of God's covenant to save us. Our Baptisms remind us that God loves and accepts us. We will be called to testing and challenge and suffering and growth – this world needs our care and attention, action and commitment, and God calls us to be part of the struggle as agents of love and protection. But we are not alone!

We all have wilderness experiences: personal testing as well as times of trial by the chances and tragedies of this life. We lose children. We lose mates. We lose jobs. We lose pride. We lose our youth and health. We move from comfortable, familiar homes to new places. We regret our failings. In these experiences, do we sense a loving companion?

Look around you. There is someone who will be a companion in your journey, if you but ask. There is someone who will pray for your courage and insight, if you but ask.

God continues to tend us through angels we recognize and others that come to us unawares. We also will be drawn, called, and even driven to those places that need special attention because they seem at times hopeless. We struggle and work and hope, because nothing can ultimately defeat those who live in God's love.

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The grocer in the small-town store watched a little boy. He would look at the pile of apples, look up at the grocer, and back at the apples. The grocer went over and asked the boy, "Are you trying to steal one of those apples?" to which the boy replied, "No, sir, I'm trying to keep from it."

Lead us not into temptation. Save us from the time of trial.

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Honesty, reality. Be comforted, my friends, with the promise that God is with you. Be comforted by God's words of forgiveness and by the promise of the Spirit who gives you the strength and the faith to live in grace, to "walk wet", as you continue God's work in this world.

May the wilderness, the desert, of this world bloom with charity, and the long world of winter surrender to a springtime of Easter joy. Amen.