

Lent 1 Year B 2015  
Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-9; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

Where to begin...I have so much I'd like to say today.

This is the first Sunday of the season of Lent...a great topic in itself.

The lessons are so great...yes, the Bible nerd.

And I've read some really engaging stuff in the first days of our readings in the N.T. Wright book that many of us are reading.

You did start on Ash Wednesday, right?

So let me start with this.

Lent began almost two thousand years ago as the time to prepare people for baptism.

This new church, the followers of Jesus, the people of the Way began to set aside these 40 days to get people ready for their initiation into the church.

The first baptisms we read about after Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension tend to be whole big groups of people.

One adult has a conversion experience and then that person's whole family gets baptized.

As time went on and the persecution of Christians ramped up they went underground.

People gathered in homes to share communion, to hear the scriptures, and to learn about what it meant to follow Jesus.

It was a dangerous business and there was secrecy in order to try and keep people safe from things like actually being thrown into the ring with lions.

So adults would be taken through a rigorous process, often several years in length.

It was a way of making sure someone didn't sneak in, infiltrate a home church, and then turn people over to the persecutors.

The baptism preparation, also known as the catechumenate, would culminate in the Lenten season with an Easter Vigil service that went all night.

The baptisms happened in the dawn hours.

An echo of the story of the resurrection of Jesus.

He was dead and then he rose from the dead.

And as the sun was rising the baptized went down in to the water to die to the old self and to rise from the water a new person in Christ.

Pretty cool, right?

These early Christians risked their very lives for a new life of following Jesus and making Jesus their Lord and King.

They entered into a covenant with God, a baptismal covenant.

It was an echo of what we heard from Genesis today.

In the aftermath of this flood that has destroyed almost all of creation God makes a covenant. The first covenant that God makes.

It's important to know that a covenant is not the same thing as a contract.

A contract is entered into by two parties with obligations to be fulfilled by both.

If either party breaks their end of the deal the contract is null and void.

Nowadays if either party breaks their end of the deal the lawyers get called but that's a whole other story.

In a covenant two parties have obligations to each other.

But in a covenant if either party breaks their end of the deal the covenant is still in place.

God makes a covenant with all of creation that God will never again destroy creation.

The rainbow in the sky is the sign of the covenant that God has made.

Usually we hear that story as saying that God has made a covenant with humanity but look again.

This covenant is with all of the earth and with every living creature.

This flood has been a baptism of sorts for creation.

As the waters receded up comes a new creation born out of God's love.

Now we know that God will keep the promises that God makes.

It is us who end up breaking this covenant.

Pretty regularly we have been destructive stewards of all that God has put in our care.

Our own lives, the loves of others, the life of our planet.

And yet God keeps on loving us and loving this earth and doing God's part to keep us going.

God does not give up on us when we fail to be the best that God has created us to be.

This is the story of God's first covenant with creation.

A story that is echoed in our stories of faith and conversion and baptism.

A story echoed in Jesus' baptism.

N.T. Wright talks to us about listening for those echoes in scripture.

The way that voices and stories from the first people of God ripple forward into the stories of the Jesus and the people he walked and lived with.

And then those echoes keep rippling forward in our own lives.

I was talking to a priest friend of mine this week who was having a tough time.

She was looking to God for something to steady her.

She asked me why she had never had a big, 2x4 alongside the head conversion experience like I had.

She said she felt like it might help her now when life felt so wobbly.

I told her that God talks to us in a way that we can hear and understand.

There isn't just one way that God talks.

And the way God talks to her, gently, in a soft voice that never ever goes away is just the right way that she can hear God.

In that moment she saw how it would actually be frightening to her to have that kind of God zapping thing happen to her.

We're all different and God talks to us in ways that we can hear and understand.

We hear the echoes in scripture of what God has been up to since the beginning of creation and it helps us to understand what God might be up to in our lives now.

I don't want to sound too heretical but brace yourselves.

Jesus came two thousand years ago and scriptures were written in ways that made sense then.

Lots of agricultural imagery... farming and sheep and goats.

Imagery of fishing and very patriarchal family systems and governments.

What if God had decided to burst into human history in the 21<sup>st</sup> century instead of way back then?

What if Jesus popped down from heaven in North America in modern times?

The images of God inspired scripture would be much different, right?

God would have spoken in the way that could be understood by us in this moment.

What would the imagery in scripture have been? Corporate America, technology, social issues unheard of back then?

It's weird to think about, isn't it?

But instead we are all called to do the work of looking for and listening for the deepest meanings that God has for us in these images that are not part of our world here.

We know that God has made a covenant to love us and to never destroy us.

And God will keep up God's end of the covenant.

And God will speak to us in ways that we can understand.

Sometimes it takes effort and work on our part.

OK, I'm not going to lie to you.

It always takes effort and work on our part.

But know that God is speaking to you.

God is speaking to you in ways that you can understand.

Echoes of deep meaning rippling through scripture.

Rippling through our relationships with people.

Yes, God does speak to us through our everyday experiences.

God speaks to us through books and movies and TV and nature and music and people.  
God has made a promise to love us and to save us.

We heard that in our collect today.

*As you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save.*

God loves us, God speaks to us in ways that we can understand, God is saving us.

God made a covenant and that covenant echoes through scripture and through our very lives.

Listen and look.

You may be a 2x4 kind of person or you may be a soft, gentle voice kind of person.

God will never break that promise to love you forever.

God knows that we're going to mess up.

We're not always going to hold up our end of the deal.

But God will.

Even when you doubt that God will.

Even when you think there's no way God is going to love you after that last thing you said or did.

God knows our weaknesses. And God is mighty to save.

We can be honest when we don't hold up our end of the deal and we can keep going because God will always be faithful.

The rainbow in the sky is proof.

God is mighty to save no matter what.