

Lent 1

[Home](#) [Up](#)

March 9, 2003

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, you led your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide now the people of your Church, that, following our Savior, we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Or

Lord God, our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us, and our ancient foe tempts us with his deceits and empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your Word and, when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Genesis 9:8-17

{8} Then God 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, {10} 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. {11} 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." {12} 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: {13} I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. {14} When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, {15} 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. {16} 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." {17} 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."

9. *I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that is with you:* "A covenant is meant to clarify an intricate or opaque legal situation between two groups or individuals. As a rule it concerns two unequal partners.... in one point the covenant with Noah is distinct from that with Abraham or at Sinai. In the latter instances the individual or the nation was called quite personally into a relation of fellowship with God and thereby faced with the question of affirming this ordinance. Here the sign of the covenant with Noah, absolutely without any confessing appropriation by the earthly partner, is high above man, between heaven and earth, as a pledge of a true *gratia praeveniens!*" [1] The covenant is with all human beings since they are all descendants of Noah and his family, and also with all living creatures.

11. *never again shall all flesh be cut off...shall there be a flood to destroy the earth:* God limits his sovereignty; he will not destroy the living creatures of the earth by flood again. In general terms, God promises to preserve the natural order and not to interfere in it to the detriment of created life. See verse 15b. Also 8:22.

13. *I have set my bow in the clouds:* "...the flood narrative served to explain the phenomenon of the rainbow.... The bow in the clouds at the end of the flood narrative has nothing to do with the image of God as a warrior carrying a bow." [2] The bow set in the heavens is both a pledge to humanity that a covenant exists between God and all creatures,

as well as a reminder to God of his promise of an eternal covenant (See Psalm 9:12: 13:1; 25:6-7; 42:9 74:2, 18-23; 77:9; 98:3; 106:4, 45 for other efforts to remind God of his promises.).

16. everlasting covenant between God and...all flesh: "The 'eternal covenant' is a phrase typical of P, Gen 17:7, 13, 19; Ex 31:16; Lev 24:8; Num 18:19; 25:13." [3]

Psalm 25:1-10

{1} To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. {2} O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. {3} Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. {4} Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. {5} Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. {6} Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. {7} Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD! {8} Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. {9} He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. {10} All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

The Psalm marks a change from the universal covenant with Noah, without any requirements, except for human life. Here Yahweh's love is promised to those who keep his covenant and his decrees, a reference to the Sinai covenant.

2-3. my enemies...who are wantonly treacherous: The singer is threatened by enemies. The latter part of the Psalm focuses on the torment the singer feels because of them.

3. be put to shame: The singer is unable to maintain his/her own honor, and begs Yahweh to preserve it, while shaming the enemies.

4-7: The singer asks for guidance and mercy from Yahweh. While God will remember his covenant with all living creatures, the singer prays that God will not remember his/her transgressions.

8-9: Yahweh's goodness is the ground for the singer's hope for guidance.

10. steadfast love and faithfulness: These are qualities of Yahweh, and qualities expected of the people who are in covenant with him. Following Yahweh's paths produce such qualities.

those who keep his covenant and his decrees: This is the language of the Sinai covenant with its commandments and ordinances and decrees.

1 Peter 3:18-22

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

19. spirits in prison, who did not obey...in the days of Noah: The "spirits in prison" are specifically those who were destroyed in the flood and more generally those who died before the coming of Christ.

20. eight persons: Noah, his wife, his sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth, and their wives.

21. prefigured: [antitipos] "antitype." The traditional interpretation is that Noah and his family are the type of which baptism is the antitype. They were saved through water, and so we, who are baptized in water, are also saved. I would like point out another possibility. The antitype could be understood to be Christ's proclamation to the spirits in prison. This fits better with verse 18 in which we are told that Christ suffered "for the unrighteous." If

this preaching to the spirits in prison is the type, then the Gospel, which saves us, is embodied in baptism.

not as a removal of dirt...but as an appeal to God: The word "baptism" means "washing," but it is not that which saves. It is through the resurrection of Christ that we can appeal to God for a good conscience.

22. *at the right hand:* Christ has ascended to heaven and sits at God's right hand with angels, authorities and powers subject to him.

Mark 1:9-15

{9} In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. {10} 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. {11} And 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. {13} He was in the wilderness 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, {15} and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Mark 1:9-11 were used on Epiphany 1B, and 1:14-15 were used on Epiphany 3 bracketing verses 13-14, the temptation narrative.

9. *baptized by John:* John's baptism was "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (1:4). While this was not a problem for Mark, Matthew reports that John was uncomfortable baptizing Jesus. In Mark the question is not relevant. Jesus transforms John's baptism into something different.

10. *he saw the...Spirit...and a voice from heaven:* Jesus alone sees the descent of the Spirit (see also Luke 3:22). In Matthew 3:17 the form of the words of the voice from heaven, "This is my Son...", imply that others heard them. John says that he saw the Spirit descend upon him like a dove (John 1:32).

You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased: In Psalm 1:7 Yahweh says of the king, "You are my son; today I have begotten you." Yahweh told Abraham, "take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love" (Genesis 22:2). Jesus' royal identity is confirmed by the voice from heaven, and his innocent suffering at God's will is hinted at.

Here, as in the story of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), Jesus takes a significant event and fills it with new meaning. Jesus is baptized not because he needs to repent. He transforms John's baptism into an anointing by God for a new, unexpected task, to proclaim the good news of the salvation of humankind.

12-13: The temptation story in Mark is very brief. The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. This is the same verb Mark uses later about Jesus casting out demons, so there is a sense that force was used.

He was in the wilderness forty days: There are several references to forty in the Old Testament. It is sort of an indefinite period of time, for example, the time the Israelites spent in the wilderness (Exodus 16:35), and the time Elijah spent in the wilderness escaping from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:4-8). A closer connection is the forty days that Noah and his companions spent in the Ark after the rain stopped but before it dried up.

tempted by Satan: That is the function of the Satan. "In the OT Satan (... 'the accuser'; 'adversary') is mentioned rarely and in late books, as an angel whose duty it is to accuse men in Job i, ii and Zech. iii.1f., and as an evil power in 1 Chron. xxi.1. Derived apparently from Persian sources, the idea is developed and appears frequently in the later Jewish writings, especially the apocryphal books and the Rabbinical literature, where under various names, Beliar, Sammael, Mastema, Satan is the prince of evil, the opponent of God, and antichrist." [4] The "temptation" is really a testing, perhaps similar to that of Job. So there does not seem to be any need to see *Satan* as a figure of evil.

he was with the wild beasts: This points to Jesus' isolation away from human companionship in the wilderness, almost perhaps as a sort of reprise of Adam's situation before the creation of his human companion.

the angels waited on him: Just as God's messengers, the angels, provided for Elijah, so here they also provide and protect Jesus.

14-15: Following John's arrest Jesus' preaching takes on a new direction. There is still the call to repent, but now coupled with a call to believe in the good news. Jesus redirects the preaching of God's prophet from repentance to faith.

Reflection

During Lent in year B, the first lessons deal with the covenants God made with his people. Today the covenant with Noah (Genesis 9) with the rainbow as its sign declares God's covenant with all living creatures. Chapter 9 is a part of the Priestly document (P). The earth was corrupt and full of violence and God decided to destroy all living creatures. He excepted Noah, "a righteous man, blameless in his generation," and his family from this judgment. God sent a great flood, which only Noah and his family and the creatures he took with him on the Ark escaped alive. After the flood was over "the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done'" (Genesis 8:21).

The covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15) is the lesson for Lent 2, and is concerned with God's covenant with all humanity. Exodus 20, the lesson for Lent 3, contains the Ten Commandments, the stipulations of the Covenant at Sinai, made between Yahweh and his people, Israel. The lesson for Lent 4 is the story of the Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21). Although it is not strictly a covenant story it does contain God's promise of healing and a sign of that promise.

The new covenant (Jeremiah 31) is the lesson for Lent 5, and seeks to resolve the tension between those covenants in which God promises his eternal favor and requires nothing but acceptance from the other party (Noah, Abraham, Phineas, and David), and the Sinai covenant which requires obedience to the law, by writing the law in the hearts of human beings, so that it is a part of their very nature. Finally, the third Servant Song (Isaiah 50:4-11) as an expression of the mission of Jesus who is the mediator of an even better covenant than Jeremiah imagined is the lesson for Lent 6.

God determined that he would never again destroy all living creatures, and he made a covenant with Noah to that effect. The rainbow is the sign of that covenant. This is the first covenant God made. God's love and forbearance toward all living creatures was fulfilled in Christ, who suffered once for all for the unrighteous, so that we "may appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

On our behalf Jesus accepted John's baptism for the forgiveness of sins and invited us to repent and believe the good news, the gospel. In baptism we receive the same love and forbearance God showed to Noah and his family, and even to those who refused to join them.

As we begin the season of Lent we are reminded where our hope lies. Not in our own goodness, but in the mercy of God. On our own we would be as lost as those who died in the flood. But God's love reaches beyond death, physical death and spiritual death, to redeem and restore the lost. God is merciful and good. In love he sent his son that through him we might have life. As we proceed through Lent we will see in the other covenants God has made with his people the continued unfolding of his love for his people.

Hymns [5]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement 1991* (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, II=Psalm; III=Second Lesson;
G=Gospel

309 --E--Lord Jesus, Think
99 --D--O Lord, throughout
79 --D--To Jordan Came
301 --I--Come to Calvary's

741v --II--Thy Holy Wings (792s)
657v --G--The Glory of These
308, 350, 450, 738s, 292, 324

Prayers of the People [6]

A: Spirit-led and beloved, Jesus won a wilderness victory over Satan. We pray, "Still our victor be," and respond, C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for nations overcome by civil strife.

P: God of might, cast out such party-spirit, prejudice, and hatred which deny humanity to fellow-citizens, and foster war. Still our victor be. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for churches torn by dissension.

P: God of peace, quiet unreason. Bring understanding as a flood that there may be a will for oneness of mind. Unveil love in Christ as the measure of what we must be and do. Still our victor be. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the frail elderly in our congregation.

P: God of love, quicken our concern for those house-bound, ill, and afraid. Call us to simple tasks of inquiry praying, phoning, visiting, sharing, and helping, Where there is darkness of feeling among them, grant remedies for wholeness and renewal. Still our victor be. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for the youth of our fellowship.

P: God of counsel, direct the young to pursue goodness. Arrest the purposes of Satan that freedom may be their joy in Christ. Still our victor be. C: Amen.

A: Let us pray for those in catechetical study.

P: God our enabler, let high purpose, strong motivation, and the need for eternal truth compel their learning. Lift up your Word of Life. Still our victor be. C: Amen.

P: Go with us in this pilgrimage of the Spirit. Admonish, correct and cleanse us, that we may find new strength within. Still our victor be. C: Amen.

Or [7]

Presider or deacon

God made a covenant with Noah and set a rainbow in the clouds. Let us pray for all the descendants of Noah, and especially for those preparing for baptism.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, sharing the death and resurrection of Christ.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and *NN* their sponsors.

For all the peoples of the earth who share God's covenant of peace.

For all who are oppressed, afflicted, or in need.

For the dying and the dead. For our families, friends, and companions, and for all those we love.

Presider

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who saved us from the flood and brought us through the wilderness. Hear our prayers for all peoples. Receive sons and daughters into your family, wash them in the waters of new life, and feed them with your bread and wine. Glory to you for ever and ever.

Notes

[1] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1961, p. 130.

[2] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*: Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984, p.473.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 474.

[4] Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1955, p. 164.

[5] <http://www.worship.ca/text/wpch0203.txt>

[6] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/pray_b1.txt

[7] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>