

Faithful

Readings

Mark 1:9-15

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised 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 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, ¹⁵ and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

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.'

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God



Reflection

God, who has created all things, draw us into a closer relationship with you. When life's waters threaten to overwhelm us, help us to trust that you are with us at all times. Re-orient us away from our poor choices and help us to choose life with you. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Lent 1, 21 February 21, p.24

As we whether this time of preparation for the celebration of Easter, as we turn our hearts and minds towards Jesus' journey towards the cross, where are you?

How are you making time to deepen your relationship with God ?

Whether spending time in prayer, reflection, bible study or getting to know and serving people who are not like you, how are you allowing God to stretch your understanding and your love?

Over the coming weeks we will encounter readings that are really hard - whether they challenge us to a deeper honesty about who we are, or they call us to something that seems beyond our capacity, or they say some things about God that are hard to understand.

This is the path we take with Jesus as he moves towards Jerusalem, arrest and death.

Today's readings offer us a starting point.

God's covenant with Noah does not come without its difficulties.

The story goes that God has just destroyed all life on the earth in the flood - a little problematic, don't you think?

But here God promises to never do it again.

The symbol of the bow is significant - the word in Hebrew, as it is in English, is the same as for the bow and arrow, implements of war.

God hangs up the weapon.

And makes a covenant, a promise.

In this promise to Noah and his family, and to all living creatures, there is no expectation in return.

God promises to never forget.

The rainbow, appearing as it does, in the clouds, often after rain, a reminder.

The reading from Mark's gospel sets the scene for the 40 days of preparation.

It begins with Jesus' baptism when the heavens are torn apart - and God's spirit breaks into the world affirming Jesus as God's beloved son (1:10-11).

And then immediately casting him, or driving him, into the wilderness.

The language is fierce (1:12).

40 days - perhaps not literally 40 days - 40 reflects the 40 days and nights of rain that flooded the earth, the 40 years the people of Israel spent wandering in their wilderness - 40, a symbol of a long but indeterminate time.

Tempted - the other gospels go into more detail about the nature of these temptations. Mark simply leaves it as Jesus is tempted (11:13).

Jesus is with the wild animals - language that evokes a companionship, a co-existence with the beasts of the earth, perhaps echoing the "every living creature" God has promised to never destroy again.

The angels wait on him or "minister to him" - they attend to his human need, physical and spiritual.

And after this time in the wilderness, he returns to his home and begins to proclaim the good news of God, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.' (1:15)

How might our own encounter with God, either at our baptism, or each and every day when we stop long enough to see the wonder of God's creation or to allow God's love to embrace us, how might that encounter drive us to live lives that reflect the kingdom of God in our midst?

And "believe in the good news".

I was listening to a podcast the other day with Bishop Michael Curry, the American Bishop who preached at Harry and Meaghan's wedding. He was talking about belief - what does it mean to *believe* in the good news?¹

He explained that the word "believe" is not about simply agreeing with a set of propositions. The root of the word 'believe' in Latin is "credo" and it is related to the root of the word "Coeur doux" which means 'heart', and is also related to *cardia*, as in cardiology. So belief is not necessarily about having to convince our heads that a set of statements is true, but to believe is *coeur doux*, committing or giving our hearts to the truth of it. 'Believe in the good news', then, becomes a commitment of our hearts to the good news of Jesus - and allowing that heart commitment to shape our living.

Don't get me wrong, we can't ignore the head stuff. God gives us intelligent minds to use and I will be the first in line for an intellectual discussion about theology and our understanding of the scriptures. But our intellectual prowess is useless without the commitment of our hearts. And sometimes, our intellect simply cannot figure out or rationalise the mystery who is God, and so we must choose - to live in the mystery and to follow a commitment of our heart - or to walk away...

Where is your heart today?

Let me then read to you a poem as we think about where our heart is, and the everlasting promise God makes to Noah and all flesh that is on the earth:

When the bow is in the clouds
do we remember promise?
Promise Divine, promise that life
will not be drowned out again?

How often we forget with our floods
of anti-others vitriol we spit
to drown out life we do not like;
pushing promise under water.

When the bow is in the clouds
do we remember trust?
Trust in the Word Divine,
covenant established and remembered?

How often we forget with our turning
to the gods and idols that we make
with the muse that you refuse
to take away, Creative Spirit.

¹ <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-bishop-michael-curry-on-love-hope-in-troubling-times/>

When the bow is in the clouds
do we remember hope?
Holy Hope of green to fill
the fields that rise as waters fall.

How often we let fear
strangle, twist, and tangle
all that's good and full of life,
starve 'us' so we can keep 'them' unfed.

When the bow is in the clouds,
God has told us we can
trust the promise and the hope.
Oh, God, help us remember!
Amen.

Sarah Agnew, <http://praythestory.blogspot.com>

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