

February 21st, 2021

First Sunday in Lent

Welcome and announcements We share Holy Communion whenever we gather so you may desire to gather a piece of bread or cracker, wine, juice or water to receive the sacrament. Please join me this week on-line for the Lenten series “Created for Community”.

Confession and Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins. Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, the keeper of the covenant, the source of steadfast love, our rock and our redeemer. **Amen.**

God hears us when we cry and draws us close in Jesus Christ. Let us return to the one who is full of compassion.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Fountain of living water,

pour out your mercy over us. Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free.

Rebuild what we have ruined and mend what we have torn.

Wash us in your cleansing flood. Make us alive in the Spirit to follow in the way of Jesus, as healers and restorers of the world you so love. Amen.

Beloved, God’s word never fails. The promise rests on grace: by the saving love of Jesus Christ, the wisdom and power of God, your sins are † forgiven, and God remembers them no more. Journey in the way of Jesus. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Day

Holy God, heavenly Father, in the waters of the flood you saved the chosen, and in the wilderness of temptation you protected your Son from sin. Renew us in the gift of baptism. May your holy angels be with us, that the wicked foe may have no power over us, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

Today’s reading is the conclusion to the flood story. Because of human sin, God destroys the earth by flood, saving only Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark. Yet divine destruction gives way to divine commitment. As in the first creation, God blesses humanity and establishes a covenant with all creatures.

⁸God 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,

¹⁰and 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.

¹¹I 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.”

¹²God 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:

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

¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,

¹⁵I 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.

¹⁶When 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.”

¹⁷God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Psalm 25:1-10

¹To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

²**My God, I put my trust in you; let me not be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.**

³Let none who look to you be put to shame; rather let those be put to shame | who are treacherous.

⁴**Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths.**

⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.

⁶**Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love, for they are from everlasting.**

⁷Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; remember me according to your steadfast love and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.

⁸**You are gracious and upright, O LORD; therefore, you teach sinners in your way.**

⁹You lead the lowly in justice and teach the lowly your way.

¹⁰All your paths, O LORD, are steadfast love and faithfulness to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.

Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

As God acted through Christ's suffering and death to bring us to God, so God acts through baptism to save us from a sinful existence. This spiritual cleansing marks our new life in Christ.

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

The Holy Gospel according to: Mark 1:9-15

Glory to you O Lord

The Spirit that comes upon Jesus at his baptism sustains him when he is tested by Satan so that he might proclaim the good news of God's reign.

⁹In 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.”
¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.
¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.
¹⁴Now 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.” The word of the Lord.....**Praise to you O Christ**

Sermon

On this first Sunday in Lent Mark gets right to the point of who Jesus is. Jesus is “*the kingdom of God*” come into the world. Mark mentions the “*Kingdom of God*” fourteen times. Mark’s gospel tells us the kingdom is coming...the kingdoms is different from the world we understand... the kingdom belongs to God and the kingdom is difficult to enter. Mark tells us the kingdom is not a place but a power. It is God’s active power to take all that is wrong in this world and make it right.

Mark makes the point (1:15a): “*the kingdom of God has come near.*” It has come near in the presence of Jesus. The gospel writer quickly tells us that Jesus was baptized, the Spirit and God’s voice came upon him, verifying his divine presence. The Spirit “*immediately drove*” (literally, “threw [Jesus] out” in the Greek language [*ekballei*]) into the wilderness for forty days of temptation. These forty days are reminiscent of Exodus, 1st Kings and 1st Samuel where God’s people are tested in the desert, a severe environment. Our Lenten forty days are to be a time of reflection for us also. In Jewish apocalypticism at the time of Mark is composing

scripture, Satan embodies evil as the demons' ringleader. Mark will refer to Satan's continuing battle against the heavenly kingdom Jesus advances.

In this gospel today, we could explore Jesus baptism or the beginning of Jesus ministry as Mark sets this up however I must tell you that I got lost in the wilderness with Jesus even though there were only two sentences in the account: "¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He (Jesus) was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him."

Mark only gives us the two sentences yet with all the fear and terror that the wilderness may hold, God is present in the wilderness with Jesus and the angels waited on him. What about the wilderness experiences that we find ourselves in? I have had my share of wilderness experiences. Times when it seemed that all I thought I knew went wrong and I was wandering in a wilderness. I have had times when all my work and planning was abandoned by the circumstances of life. I am sure many of you have had wilderness times from fear, grief, heartache or disappointment.

Recently I read of a woman who was a powerful witness to a wilderness experience. Her name is Kayla Mueller, a young woman who died about seven years ago while being held captive by the terror group ISIS. Here is a portion of her letter her family received after her death:

"I remember mom always telling me that all in all in the end the only one you really have is God. I have come to a place in my experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our creator because literally there was no one else... by God and by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in free-fall. I have been shown in darkness, light and have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful."

It seems to me that if there is a gift in wilderness times it is this: we are reminded that 'in the end, the only one you really have is God.' And what a wonder it is in such times to experience being 'tenderly cradled in free-fall' by that same God.

This last calendar year has been a free-fall year for all of us. We were thrown into the wilderness. Most people in this generation have never experienced a pandemic. Most of us never thought much about communicable diseases. We found ourselves overwhelmed by media. We all looked to different news sources that divided us and the disease even became a political volleyball for some. Some of us found our relationships strained and even damaged because of differing opinions about the corona virus, For some there were accusations that we chose to respond based on our political preferences. There were no gatherings as usual in stores, restaurants or even church. No funerals, weddings or birthday parties in the usual ways. No traveling and no family gatherings in the old way without precautions.

The pandemic unveiled inequities for people of color and women. We saw the worst of humanity in hate speech and action. What a wilderness year. At the same time...angels were

attending to us. There were acts of love, giving and compassion . We also saw some of the best of humanity and God was there, Jesus was in the wilderness with us.

We only heard a small part of Kayla Mueller’s letter to her family about the wilderness that she found herself in before her death. I believe Kayla experienced some of what Jesus did. She came to the same conclusion’s that Jesus did. In the ministry of Jesus, his living and especially in his dying, he surrendered to the One he called Father. This is where it is a bit different. Jesus did not only witness the light in the darkness. Jesus *is* the light in our darkness.

Thinking of your life now, what wilderness have you been in? What wilderness are you in right now? The pandemic wilderness continues but there is great hope as numbers come down. That aside, each of us have additional challenges within the global challenge.

As we reflect on our forty days in the wilderness of Lent, we must remember that although there is temptation to be in fear and terror, Satan, wild beasts and all...there are also attending angels, and God the creator and Jesus with us. I trust that we will all be “*tenderly cradled in free- fall*” by the love of God. Name your wilderness experiences knowing that God is with you and Jesus is the light in any darkness we encounter. The kingdom, the power and the glory are God’s. Amen.

We share the word of our faith in **the Apostles Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.* On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence. In Jesus, your realm has come near to us in every place and time. Give your church throughout the world a spirit of humility and repentance; teach us to trust always in the good news of your salvation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have made a covenant of mercy with every living creature. Protect all the earth’s creatures from destruction. Empower the work of biologists, conservationists, and science educators. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

All your paths are steadfast love and faithfulness. Direct the words and actions of leaders in our community and throughout the world, that they may maintain justice for the lowly. Be with those in the military who sacrifice for justice especially Logan, **JJ, Bryan, Dustin, Brad and Travis**. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Even in the wilderness you are with us. Walk alongside migrants and refugees crossing dangerous lands. Tend to those whose lives feel desolate. Give healing and strength to all who suffer **especially Brad Shippert and those in care faculties that we know Sibyl, Barb, Tammy, Trudy, Jessica, Hazel, Jeanne, Linda, Ed and Marian**. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the covenant of baptism, you claim us as beloved children. Nurture us in our baptismal identity and teach us to live within it for the sake of others. Strengthen this congregation's ministries of care and concern. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In baptism you join us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We praise you for all those who have died trusting in your faithfulness. Bring us with them to the fullness of your reign. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Offering Prayer Faithful God, you walk beside us in desert places, and you meet us in our hunger with bread from heaven. Accompany us in this meal, that we may pass over from death to life with Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Gathered into one by the power of the Holy Spirit we pray as Jesus taught ...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Invitation to Communion

Jesus draws the whole world to himself. Come to this meal and be fed.

Holy Communion Together

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, that, renewed in the gift of baptism, we may come to the fullness of your grace.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me. For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Take your bread/cracker	The body of Christ given for you
Take you juice/wine/water	The blood of Christ shed for you

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in His grace.

Prayer after Communion

God of steadfast love, at this table you gather your people into one body for the sake of the world. Send us in the power of your Spirit, that our lives bear witness to the love that has made us new in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Blessing

You are what God made you to be: created in Christ Jesus for good works, chosen as holy and beloved, freed to serve your neighbor.

God bless you ✝ that you may be a blessing, in the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the good news.

Thanks be to God.