

Mark 1:9-15

Did you hear a theme in today's readings? Other than the Psalm they all mention water. Water. Water is important to life. My geography teacher in elementary school told our class that in the end it will come down to who controls the water will control the world. The thing about water is that it cannot be easily controlled.

It is not safe to drive into water because the road under the water could be washed out and you have no idea of its actual depth, nor the strength of the current. Another thing that isn't wise to do is try to walk across a river. I remember when I was about 15 years old, I met a boy, Danny, at Cloverleaf Campground where my family was camping with friends. Danny and I decided we were walking across the Allegheny River taking my polaroid camera along in a plastic bag. Half way across the water was about shoulder level, and the bag was held high in the air. We made it across, took pictures, and made it back safely. It wasn't until later that evening, when we were talking to a woman who regularly camped at the campground, that we found out the river's depth was usually over 7 feet, and we were very lucky. I never had the urge to walk across a river again.

Another thing about large bodies of water is the hidden undertow currents. I remember my mom telling me about swimming in Lake Erie when she was a teenager. She was caught in an undertow and didn't know how to swim out of it. Luckily her older brother was there and knew about undertow currents. He swam parallel to the shore to reach her, and continued swimming in that direction with her on his back until they broke through the currents and were safely out of the water.

Water is wonderful. Water is the staff of life. Our bodies are mostly composed of water. But water is chaos. Nearly all ancient faiths included a flood narrative. In seminary we had to study a Sumerian epic, Gilgamesh which speaks of a flood let loose by the gods who then discovered they could not control nor stop the flood. In contrast, Genesis begins with God controlling the waters. The Spirit of God moves over the face of the formless void and the water is separated by land. Much later in the book of Genesis God instructs Noah to build a boat and take his family and the animals with him. God started the water for the flood, and God ends the water of the flood.

In our reading from Genesis this morning God has safely brought Noah and his family out of the flood and creates a covenant symbolized by the rainbow that a flood will never cover the entire earth at once again. God considers our different ways of seeing the universe to make sure we understand there's not going to be a worldwide flood anymore. God tells Noah, the first time Noah does not acknowledge God. So God places a rainbow in the sky and again promises there will not be a worldwide flood ever again. Every time I see a rainbow, I not only remember the covenant between God and the earth, I remember a bookmark that was given to me years ago. It had a picture of a rainbow on it with the caption "Rainbows remind me of God's love." Water can be dangerous, water is chaos, but God controls the waters. God controls the universe, God controls chaos, not the other way around, chaos does not control God.

And, according to the reading from 2nd Peter we heard this morning, just as Noah and his family were saved from the flood by God, we are saved from the chaos of the water through our baptism. This reading also reminds us that Jesus Christ, who was righteous, completely without sin, suffered and died to save sinful humanity. As we hear in our Apostle's Creed, he is seated at the right hand of God and will come to judge the living and the dead. That can be a scary thought for those who do not believe that Jesus can save them, but for those of us who are baptized in the name of the Triune God and believe Jesus is God's son, we can stand on the promises of God that we will not be separated from the love of Christ, and God's grace through Jesus will save us from our sin.

We can believe Jesus is God's son because we know through the gospels that God spoke at Jesus' baptism, calling Jesus "My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." John the Baptist submerged Jesus into the chaos of the waters of the Jordan River and baptized him. I have always believed John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, but other theories say that John's baptism was not for the redemption of sin, but to introduce the baptized to the Messianic Kingdom. Either way, Jesus had no need to be baptized but chose to do so, and in his obedience God rent open the skies and spoke.

After his baptism Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the spirit. Mark's gospel gives us the very short version of Jesus' temptations by the devil in the wilderness, but he does mention that Jesus was tempted and then, not succumbing to the temptations, he was ministered to by the angels. Even Jesus was not promised an easy life on earth, so we cannot expect our lives to be easy because we are a Christ follower. There will always be difficulties, there will always be temptations. There will be times that we will give in to temptation. When we do, and realize what we have done, and are ready and willing to change, we can change through the power of Jesus.

While Jesus was in the wilderness, John the Baptist was arrested by Herod. It wasn't until the Baptist's arrest that Jesus began his earthly ministry. It was a chaotic time but through it all God's will is fulfilled. Jesus was equipped to handle whatever came his way – even death by crucifixion.

Jesus went into Galilee saying, "The kingdom of God has come near." Jesus means that the kingdom is physically near, not here yet, but still on the way and getting closer. Jesus is ushering in a new season, it has started, it's not finished yet, but it is happening. Right now.

Jesus calls us to "repent and believe in the good news." Jesus doesn't mean to simply say you are sorry, he means turn around, change your direction, begin your journey back to where we belonged all along, living in a harmonious relationship with God. This is attainable because of what Jesus has done for us through his life, death and resurrection. I invite you to take time this week to ask God what one area of focus you can turn away from that will bring you into a closer relationship with God. All glory be to God.