

**Weekend of Sunday, February 21, 2021**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent /Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**  
**First Reading: Genesis 9:8-17**  
**Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22**  
**Gospel Reading: Mark 1:9-15**  
**Sermon Title: “Noahic Covenant”**

## **Theme**

*The Sundays in Lent lead us to focus on five covenants God makes in the Hebrew Scriptures and to use them as lenses through which to view baptism. First Peter connects the way God saved Noah’s family in the flood with the way God saves us through the water of baptism. The baptismal covenant is made with us individually, but the new life we are given in baptism is for the sake of the whole world.*

## **Text**

### **Genesis 9:8-17**

<sup>8</sup>God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>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: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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.” <sup>17</sup>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.”

### **1 Peter 3:18-22**

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

## Sermon

Most mainline Christian denominations recognize five major covenants that God made with humankind. And a few of them show up in the readings for Lent and so I have decided to preach a five-week series on those five major covenants. Today is the first in the series and is known as the "Noahic Covenant" and though the way I pronounced it might throw you off, it is the covenant God made with Noah after the flood that was marked with the sign of the rainbow.

But to get to the covenant, which is finally recorded in Genesis 9, we have to wade through what caused the flood, which caused God to make the covenant with Noah and all humankind.

You all know the second creation story from Genesis 2 which included the first man and women, who we eventually learn are named Adam and Eve. What we need to know about this story is that God created a perfect existence for the couple. All of creation lived in perfect harmony in a place called the Garden of Eden.

The trouble started when the serpent tricked Adam and Eve to sin. And for their disobedience, their choice to sin rather than to obey God, they got kicked out of the Garden and the gate to the Garden was closed forever.

As if that wasn't punishment enough, Adam was told he would have to toil for a living, and Eve was told that she would have to endure the pain of childbearing. And the earth would produce thorns and thistles.

Adam and Eve did have children, at least two, Cain, who was "a tiller of the ground," and Abel, who was "a keeper of sheep." Jealousy entered Cain and he killed Abel, and as a result, Cain was sent away from the family. Adam and Eve had more children and their descendants are listed in Genesis Chapters 4 and 5. Among the last descendants listed is Noah.

But by Chapter 6:5, without a great deal of explanation, the writer noted that:

<sup>5</sup>The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

<sup>6</sup>And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. <sup>7</sup>So the LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the

human beings I have created — people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.

So as I see it, in summary, God created, humankind sinned, things got worse, so bad in fact, that God regretted creating humankind, and God's response was to wipe them off the face of the earth. All of them except one man by the name of Noah and his family, because Noah had "found favor in the sight of the LORD."

So God commanded Noah to build an ark for him and his family and put animals in it and when all was ready, caused rain to fall, the first time rain ever fell on the earth, and the whole earth was flooded and all living things of the earth drowned.

And when the rain stopped and the water dried up, Noah and his family, became creation's second chance. Upon exiting the ark, Noah made a sacrifice to the LORD. This is the first time animals had been killed and sacrificed.

<sup>21</sup>And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, 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.

After this, our First Reading from Genesis 9 occurs and as you know, because we just heard it moments ago, God established a covenant between himself and all creation,

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." <sup>12</sup>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: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Many religious traditions have a flood story. The Judeo-Christian tradition is not special in that regard. Despite the stories of an ark-like-structure being seen but not verified on Mt. Ararat, no one really knows if any of this story is factually true or if it is just a legend explaining how sin entered the human story.

And to that I say, that misses the point. Because the fact is, that sin has entered the human story, and unless something is done about it, the gate to the Garden of Eden, perhaps a metaphor for life eternal in heaven with God, remained closed by human sin.

So great! God gave humanity a second chance and promised to never cause a global flood again. What's the point? I am so glad you asked.

The God we worship is indeed a God of *a* second chance – that is how much God loves what God creates. But all it takes is another couple of page turns and we read that sin once again entered the human story. God will never cause another global flood, but God is still disgusted by human disobedience, and what we will see over the next five weeks is that God tirelessly attempts to find a way to win our attention once and for all. There are times when

- God tried ignoring humankind,
- God tried turning God's back on humankind,
- God gave humankind the Ten Commandments, and other commandments totaling 613 commandments,
- God sent foreign armies to bring punishment upon God's people,
- God sent leaders, judges, kings, prophets, priests, and rabbis,
- and nothing worked.

What will it take to reach us, people?

What we should learn from this first covenant already, the Noahic Covenant, is that the God we worship is a God who is so full of love, grace, and mercy that God will go to extremes to win our attention, and when all other measures failed, God took the responsibility for our righteousness. We contribute nothing to our own salvation except our sinfulness and need for grace. This is how much God loves us.

Well, I'm getting ahead of myself. This story will be continued next week.

**Prayer**

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Lord God, in your own words, we are a stiff-necked people. We thank you for your never-failing love, grace, and mercy. Without it, we are lost. Bless us along our Lenten Journey. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen