

Mark 1:9-15

Feb 18, 2024

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Originally, Lent was the season for getting ready for Baptism. Those who wished to become Christian, spent 40 days studying, praying, and contemplating, and then those who were ready were baptized at the Easter Vigil and brought into the Church.

This was in the early days when Christianity wasn't a major religion, back when becoming a Christian could result in being thrown out of your family.

Becoming Christian was a huge decision that wasn't taken lightly. So, for 40 days the catechumenates prepared themselves, but they didn't do it alone. The rest of the congregation joined with them. Those who were already baptized members of the Church would study with the catechumenates, pray with them, and also discern where God was calling them.

Lent was very much a congregational event. Everyone joined in the focused time of discernment, prayer, worship, and study, and then everyone went to Easter Vigil to be with those who were being baptized.

During the celebration of Easter, the catechumenates were submerged into the water, which represents dying to the ways of this world, and then brought up into a new life in Christ that was dedicated to continuing Christ's mission in the world. A life of selfless service.

If you visit the area where Jesus was baptized on the Jordan side of the Jordan River, you will see a baptismal area that was cut out of the river and had water flowing through it. The person being baptized would start at one end, be baptized, and then come out the other side. Also symbolic of death to resurrection. You can find something similar in Phillipi where Lydia was baptized by Paul.

An important image that we have lost over time, as we have gone from the river to the font for infant baptisms, which has been happening since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, is the image of drowning.

And I bring that up today, because one of the most disturbing parts of the Noah story is all the people and animals drowning in the waters of chaos.

Because of all the evil that was happening, God poked a hole in the dome of the sky and the area below the land. This let loose the waters of chaos, which were to cleanse the world of all evil and allow God to start over again with a clean slate, with Noah and his family, and the animals on the ark.

The only problem with that was that God did not solve the problem God was hoping to fix. After the ark landed safely, Noah got drunk and fell asleep naked in his tent. Ham walked in and saw him, which led Noah to curse his son, and this has led to all sorts of ugliness in the world based on racism. Ham is the father of Africans, Asians.

The story of Noah is actually quite disturbing if you think about it. As much fun as it is to put all the animals in the boat two by two, there is a lot of ugliness in the story as well.

First, God curses, which leads to a world of death, and then Noah curses, which leads to more sibling rivalry and enslavement. It's not the cute nursery story we like to acknowledge. It is much darker than that.

And so, it is especially important as we contemplate Noah, Jesus, and Baptism, that we acknowledge the drowning that happens in all of these events.

In the Noah story, God sets loose the waters of chaos and drowns everything except what was on the boat. At Jesus Baptism, God incarnate, enters the waters of the Jordan and joins us in the drowning that happens in Baptism, the drowning that also happened with creation at the time of Noah.

By entering into these waters and drowning with us and all of creation, Jesus sanctifies all who have drowned and brings us all up into new life, a new life that is marked by forgiveness.

God drowns for us in order to bring all of us up into new life, including all that was drowned at the time of Noah.

So, in Mark, after Jesus is brought up out of the water, he sees the Holy Spirit in dove shape, which reminds us of the dove that returned to Noah after the land had dried out and they were safe to leave the ark.

Jesus is bringing all of creation into a new reality, a new reality where all of creation is saved, not just the chosen few, where everything that was drowned is forgiven and given new life.

Baptism is all about death and resurrection, death to the old ways and life in a new way of being with God who forgives and heals, not one who condemns and kills.

Even God can see that wrath is not the answer, because it doesn't end the cycle of violence and hate, it only encourages it, and so God places a rain bow in the sky to say, no more of this. The waters of chaos will never be released again. That was a mistake. I am sorry.

But, the rain bow didn't lead to peace on earth. Instead, it led Noah to curse his son Ham, which goes against the bow in the sky that is for all of creation, including Ham and his descendants.

And so, Jesus comes to set that wrong right, and he does it by drowning in the waters and raising everything up with him to new life.

Unfortunately, this new life does not make life easy, because it is the opposite of the ways of the world. It can actually make us a target as the satan, the adversary, tries to make us believe that God is out to get us or that we have to earn or deserve salvation.

That is not God doing that. Just look to the cross that was lifted up and you know God. God is killed. God kills no one. God dies for us, forgives us, and resurrects us to new life

And not just people, but all of creation.

As Jesus came out of the waters of Baptism, he was taken by that Spirit out into the wilderness where there were wild animals there to greet him and where angels served him.

Jesus came for all of creation, all of it, including what was drown in the flood at the time of Noah.

God says – I am sorry for the flood, that was wrong, here is a bow in the sky that will appear every time it rains as a reminder of my promise to never harm you again. God says – you are forgiven all of your trespasses against me, because even I, the great I am, made a mistake and have learned from it.

God says, here is my son. I am the Creator becomes the I am created, becoming one with creation. Then, because of sin, he is then killed on the cross, but will not stay dead. He is raised to new life, and in doing so brings all of creation with him.

There is no flood of destruction, only resurrection into new life.

Then God asks that, because we are forgiven, we also forgive others as well and be Christian – be little Christs. Don't be like Noah cursing Ham, be like Christ who blesses, forgives, and brings life to everyone. We are called to be Christians, not Noahites.

And never forget, if you ever feel as if you are drowning, Jesus is there. He is in the waters with you, and he will always bring you back up into life, because you are eternally connected to him through Baptism and nothing can kill God. Not drowning, cursing, or the cross. And because of that, nothing can end your life in Christ either.

Thanks be to God. Amen.