

“Impatient Patience”

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: Psalm 25:1-10 - Prayer for Guidance and for Deliverance

Your paths, O Lord, are steadfast love and faithfulness. (Ps. 25:10)

¹ *To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.*

² *O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.*

³ *Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*

⁴ *Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.*

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

⁶ *Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.*

⁷ *Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness’ sake, O Lord!*

⁸ *Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.*

⁹ *He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.*

¹⁰ *All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.*

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.

Gospel: Mark 1:9-15

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."

This past November, I happened to hear an episode of "The Next Chapter" by Shelagh Rogers on CBC Radio.

Her guest was the now-retired Senator and Justice Murray Sinclair, who is also a First Nations lawyer, and who served as Chairman of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 2009 to 2015. His son, Niigan is a professor at the University of Manitoba and is a frequent guest on CBC's political commentary show, *Power and Politics*.

A few years ago, Justice Sinclair had suffered a minor stroke from which, with treatment and therapy, he was able to recover, thankfully. Nonetheless, the rehab took almost a year, and in the natural self-reflection that occurred, as well as the birth of his first granddaughter, he realized that he might not be around to tell her the family stories when she started to ask, so he decided to write his memoir. As he shared with Shelagh Rogers:

"Four questions inspired this memoir: Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I? I didn't invent these questions. I first heard them when I was studying philosophy at the University of Manitoba, just prior to law school. I heard an elder speak about them at a ceremonial gathering that was held in Saskatchewan at the World Assembly of First Nations.

"He spoke about how every parent's responsibility is to help their children understand those four questions and to learn how to answer them. I was struck by that. I was struck by the fact that my family and my grandparents had endeavoured to give me answers to those questions.

Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I?

Our Lenten journey offers us the opportunity to address those and similar questions: “How did I come to be part of the Christian community”? “Who am I as a baptized child of God?” “Who am I in relation to my circle, my community, my world?” “Where is God calling me to be and do?”

We begin Lent with Ash Wednesday, with the echo of the words spoken to Adam by God before banishing him from the Garden: “[¹⁹*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken;] you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen. 3:19)*

We are reminded in that act of receiving ashes on our foreheads that we are mortal, finite beings, coming out of dust, and one day returning to it. The existential task for us is to build a life from the first dust to the last, and the task for people of faith is to build that life not only for ourselves and our closest ones, but to build a life that is a gift to others. Lent is the gift of the church year that gives us the opportunity to “go into ourselves” a bit, to reflect on those questions of faith and life, and to renew and re-commit ourselves to God.

Our scriptures launch us on that journey today with the final part of the story of Noah and the Ark, with God renewing his covenant with Noah:

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.”

This is mirrored by our Gospel text, where Jesus is baptized by John, then immediately led into the desert where he fasted for forty days. The forty days of Lent are modeled after this withdrawal by Jesus, although I think most of us would be very hard pressed to last for 4 days, let alone 40...!

Nonetheless, welcome to Lent!

Lent can be about many things – reflection, repentance, covenant, contemplation, exploration, retreat, new beginnings.

In that respect, this Lent is not unlike other Lents we have undertaken, each of us to varying degrees. Most congregations offer additional mid-week services, or soup suppers, or Bible study – and thanks to technology, we can go exploring to see what other congregations have to offer, so that we can spend more of our time immersed in spiritual practice renewing our faith, asking ourselves “Who am I?” and “Who am I in relation to God, in relation to my circle, in relation to the world?”

More questions Interestingly, inserted between these two texts this Sunday is something of interest from the 1st letter of Peter: *“God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark” (1 Peter 3:20)*. As the theological reflection on this text from Sundays and Seasons comments:

“God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark” (1 Peter 3:20). Imagine God’s patience waiting for Noah to saw the boards, hammer the nails, seal the hull, and finish the ark. How is God being patient now? What growth in individuals, in the congregation, or in the community is God waiting for patiently? How is God’s patience revealed as we look back at the history of the congregation or the history of one’s life? (Sundays and Seasons, February 21, 2021)

I like that image of God waiting patiently....indeed, we get a sense of it in a few places in scripture, such as, *“⁸The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Ps. 103:8)*

God is indeed patient with us, as we stumble around and try to figure it all out, yet I would think that God is also at times impatient. Impatient when we fight the science of climate change and the need to get our act together on the environment; impatient when we fight the medical science and public measures in the midst of a pandemic, impatient when we come up with all kinds of excuses to deny others equality and justice. Impatient when we have all kinds of reasons why we cannot take time for prayer, meditation, reflection and service. We are each given 168 hours in a week – can we not spend at least a

few of them in contemplation and prayer? We hear this “patient impatience” in the words of the prophet Micah:

*[⁶ 'With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?]*

***⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?***

Our patience is being tried in spades, this Lent, this year. Patience as we wait in lines to allow appropriate distancing, patience as we await the arrival of the vaccines and our turn, patience as we remind ourselves that whatever staff people we are dealing with, they are doing their job, and deserve respect, patience as we look at the numbers every day and ask yet again, “How long, o Lord, how long?”

And in the midst of this “impatient patience” we are reminded that we are baptized, beloved children of God. Baptism is belonging, baptism is being reminded not only who we are, but whose we are; baptism is being reminded

that we are patiently and lovingly “called to be” by God – loved and redeemed, blessed and renewed.

In Jesus’ baptism, we heard ¹¹*And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”* That voice was spoken at our baptism, and that voice continues to be spoken over us, each and every day by a patient and impatient God, wanting what is best for us and for the world, and reminding us ever so gently and ever so patiently – “get over yourselves and get on with it.”.

So, beloved children of God, claimed and re-claimed in the waters of Holy Baptism - go patiently forth into Lent, do whatever you can to “... *do justice,to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.*”

A blessed Lent to you all! Amen.