

Pastor Jon's Sermon for February 21, 2021

Text: Genesis 9:8-17 and Mark 1:9-15.

“The power of water”

Like our lessons for today, water has taken center stage in the news this week. In Texas, the cold, snow, and ice have taxed the power grid, causing power outages and heat loss to 4 million people, and wreaked havoc on the water supply due to pipes bursting. Our prayers and support go out to our neighbors in the southern US who are struggling and will be for some time for clean water and heat.

Also in the news this week, we met Perseverance, the Mars Rover who landed safely on Mars. We learned about the miracle of modern engineering, the seven minutes of terror, and a dried-up lake called Jezero. I had no idea there was once a lake on Mars the size of Lake Tahoe that had a river flowing into it. Percy landed there and will be searching for signs of current or past life.

Water, which is necessary for life, can also cause bring about great destruction.

In our first lesson from Genesis 9, we get the conclusion of the flood story. Here, God makes a covenant with Noah and his family after the ark and the flood to “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.” Genesis 8:21. God promises to never again destroy all flesh with a flood. And the sign of the covenant will be the rainbow in the sky.

But prior to the flood, the Lord God was deeply grieved by the wickedness of humans. “Every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually,” says Genesis 6:5.

Recall from your Sunday school days the original sin. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God. God gave them rules to live by... don't eat from that tree over there... but they were tempted by the serpent and ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They realized they were naked, made fig leave clothing, and hid from God. When confronted by God, they lied. Adam then blamed Eve. They

had kids and sin continued to the next generation. Cain became jealous of his brother Abel because God liked Abel's offering better, so Cain went out and killed Abel. In the soap operas, you never wanted to be cast as the character Cain.

God was deeply grieved by all the sin in the world. So, in order to cleanse the world of sin, God was going to flood the earth. But first, God found one righteous person, Noah, and told him to build an ark, and load it with all the creatures of the earth 2X2. You know the rest of the story.

The waters of the flood cleansed the earth. But did the humans overcome sin? No.

God made more covenants throughout history with the people... thinking this time they will get it. We will learn about these covenants during the season of Lent. But the humans could never live up to their end of the bargain.

But how patient was God with the humans. They continuously turned away from God. They turned to idols, neglected justice, and ignored the poor. Eventually God said I am going to make a new covenant with all humans that will be unconditional. It will be written on their hearts. No longer will people have to say, "Know the Lord." God will remember our sin no more. This covenant is in Jeremiah 31.

Thankfully God is gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Humans haven't come very far in the sin category. We still lie, get angry, jealous, and try to go it alone. We blame others for our problems. We are still are violent with each other in words and actions.

Fortunately, God doesn't have to flood the earth to cleanse us from sin. God promised to never do that again.

But God made a new covenant with us in sending Jesus into the world. God showed how much God loves us by taking on human flesh. In our Gospel for today, God showed solidarity with us in the waters of baptism. Just as Jesus, God in flesh, was without sin, entered the waters of John's baptism. Jesus wanted to identify with

us in every way. Then heavens opened up, the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove, and the voice of God said, ‘you are my Son, the beloved with you I am well pleased’, and God names us and claims us too as God’s beloved children too. You too have received the promised Holy Spirit in your baptism.

In baptism we are washed clean and have protection from powers of sin, death, and the devil ruling our life. We will still sin and fall short. But, God sees us now through the lens of Jesus Christ in our baptism. On the cross Jesus died for our sins. The sign of the cross traced on our foreheads in our baptism and most recently on Ash Wednesday is a sign of God’s covenant with us in Jesus. Here we are put into right relationship with God. We are forgiven and set free. Noah was righteous by his faith and actions, we are righteous because of our faith and baptism in Jesus.

The waters of baptism symbolize drowning of our old self and rising to the new self in Christ on a daily basis. We should not continue on in a life of that runs counter to Jesus’ teaching of love just because there is grace. We need to take God’s grace for us as a gift and live it out in service to others in the name of Jesus.

Yes, God grieves when we sin or when people’s lives are destroyed by things we do, and things out of our control. As humans, we bring much destruction on ourselves. I worry, for example, about our climate. But do I worry enough to change my own behaviors and choices?

Finally, right after Jesus’ baptism the Spirit cast him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for 40 Days and 40 Nights. Jesus made it through that time of testing thanks to the help of angels, who waited on him.

An angel in the Bible doesn’t necessarily mean they have 6 wings and 8 eyes. “Angelos” in Greek simply means “messenger”. An angel is a messenger of God. God comes to us through created means. And many of those messengers have a word for us from God. I hear God speaking through the words and cries of others, including creation.

How many angels are waiting on us now as we are in this time of testing with Corona Virus and things like Power failures? How many people who are delivering bottled water, restoring power lines, putting shots in our arms, and making sure we have food and medical care are angels waiting on us?