

1st Sunday of Lent

23 B 27SMF      Insights #100 Psalm 25(24)      Gen 9:8-15 1      Peter 3:18-22      Mark 1:12-15

Response: All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant.

The original sin is matricide

This psalm suits Noah perhaps more than anyone else in the Bible. The Psalm is about living a life of covenanted love with God and it is of Noah's mission in Genesis that the word "covenant" is first used in the Bible. The psalm is a somewhat artificially constructed poem, a workhorse, each stanza following up with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This is a wisdom structure where depth is achieved by repetition. Noah knew both structure and repetition. "Noah walked with God," (Genesis 6:9). Noah receives more than honorable mention in recent ecological discussions because the history of environmental relationships is crucial to understanding the conflict between humankind and nature. Yet, at the same time, Noah points to the salvation of humankind and the sustainability of all earthlings. His story is told between that of Adam and Eve at the beginning and Abraham's blessing for all future time: "Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Genesis 1-11 is written as prologue to that blessing, a history before history that tells of the beauty and the tragedy of the human story. God created all very good, (Genesis 1:31) but violence (Genesis 6:5) disrupted God's order and brought back chaos and introduced suffering. God begins again with Noah and makes a covenant with him, his generations, and all the earth. "I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."(Genesis 9:13) Over the course of the long story of the flood and the ark, Noah's spirit of obedience to the mission given him by God emerges strongly. The theme of Ps.25 is reparative. Noah's covenant with God introduces forever into the spirituality of covenant a reparative note. God who regretted creating humankind (Genesis 6:6) now sets about repairing the brokenness that came in the return of chaos. What does it mean? Peter is swift to make the connections with our baptism: "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, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him. (1 Peter 3:20-22).

In that discussion, Peter refers to those in prison whom the Risen descended into hell to deliver. "He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey..." Peter addresses the plight of those who failed the challenge of creation and abused the earth. Each passing day, more people are beginning to recognize the seriousness of the scientific proof that shows the level to which we have abused our earth. With this recognition comes a passionate admission that disrespect for the earth is disrespect for one's own body and consequently everybody as a unified living system of being.

The temptations of Jesus would seem to be a subject that Mark would develop at length. He was however content to evoke a scene which both Noah and Peter would recognize: "And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him." (Mark 1:13). The mention of the wild beasts is Mark's own. There is no better place than the wilderness to contemplate our abuse of the earth. Our baptism: overcome the temptation to matricide, Mother Nature."

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