

Lent 1
February 21, 2021

Genesis 9:8-17

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹²And 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: ¹³I have set my bow in the cloud, 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.”

Psalms 25:1-9

¹ To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; my God, I put my | trust in you;*

let me not be humiliated, nor let my enemies triumph | over me.

² Let none who look to you be | put to shame;*

let the treacherous be disappointed | in their schemes.

³ Show me your | ways, O LORD,*

and teach | me your paths.

⁴ Lead me in your | truth and teach me,*

for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all | the day long.

⁵ Remember, O LORD, your compas- | sion and love,*

for they are from | everlasting.

⁶ Remember not the sins of my youth and | my transgressions;*

remember me according to your love

and for the sake of your good- | ness, O LORD.

⁷ Gracious and upright | is the LORD;*

therefore he teaches sinners | in his way.

⁸ He guides the humble in | doing right*

and teaches his way | to the lowly.

⁹ All the paths of the LORD are | love and faithfulness*

to those who keep his covenant and his | testimonies.

1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸For Christ also suffered^[b] once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which^[c] he went and proclaimed^[d] to the spirits in prison, ²⁰because^[e] they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹Baptism, which corresponds to this, 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 having been subjected to him.

Mark 1:9-15

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son;^[d] with you I am well pleased."

¹²The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; ^[e]repent and believe in the gospel."

Message: Time's Up!

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

First Sunday of Lent, we enter into a time of reflection that Jesus speaks about in our lesson – a time of repentance. It's difficult if not maybe impossible to feel appropriately repentant if we don't correctly understand what it is.

Repentance is more than saying, "Oops – my bad!" It's not simply feeling sorry, because if we're honest, we'll recognize that most of the time what we're sorry about is having been caught in our sins! Repentance includes contrition – a deep sorrow over having broken God's heart by our actions and turning back and going a different way. Its undoing thousands of years of rebellion that have become engrained into our very nature.

It is also helpful to what we're supposed to feel sorry about or repentant of. Luther suggested that a good place to start would be in reflecting on the 10 Commandments and his explanations of them. When we do that, we begin to see just how far short we fall! But repentance cannot stop with that list of Commandments or any other list because our condition is not merely the sum total of our bad deeds. It's not just about the evil that we do, it is about the evil that we are. We are not basically good people who occasionally make 'mistakes'!

As we reflect on this, we undoubtedly fall victim to several critical errors. The first is our assumption that we can fix this; we just need to try harder, apply a different system of ethics. Perhaps we just need to ask 'What would Jesus do?', and then if we do that, then we'll be OK!

The problem is that it's a lie! We can't fix this – again, the problem is not simply what we do, but what we are. It's like Lucy in the Peanuts cartoon when she sets up her counseling booth and advises Charlie Brown: "Do you know what your problem is, Charlie Brown? The problem with you is that you are you!" We cannot fix who we are. That requires dying and being re-born, and that's not something we can choose or make happen now any more than we could impact our original birth. How many of us had anything to do with your birth? Where it occurred, when it occurred, or who your parents were to be?

Our confessions declare it, but we have either stopped believing what they proclaim, or we never understood it to begin with:

We confess that we are in bondage to sin and *cannot free ourselves*

Recalling that to *Repent* is to turn back, some things can't be turned back!

We cannot turn back time; We cannot fix what we have already done. We can't undo what we did 5 minutes ago!

All this leads us to our second and perhaps most critical error: In spite of what I just said, we continue to believe that we can indeed either fix the problem, repent of it, or both. We also believe that there is time to do so. It is the notion that pretty soon time will run out, and then it will be too late. After all, we're not dead yet, right!

Wrong!

Jesus did not say, "Time is almost up!" Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled!" Time's up!

Imagine a kindergarten teacher telling her class, "*I have to go to the office. I won't be gone long. Please work quietly at your desk until I return.*"

Almost immediately some are out of their chairs, wandering around the classroom. Within 5 minutes, some are now wandering down the hall, paper airplanes are being constructed...

Her absence stretches to 20 minutes...

Now some students have found their way to the playground, the class guinea pig is nowhere to be found, paper airplanes are floating in the aquarium. Suzie is crying because Jean called her names. Jon and Sam are rolling on the floor, fists flailing. One window is broken, six desks are upside down...

You get the picture?

Suddenly with a tremendous crash, the door burst open...Teacher's back!

What's the problem? Too much has gone wrong; too much is broken; too much disobedience has occurred. It can't be fixed...

But the Bigger problem? Time's up! There is no more time! Not only is the problem so big it cannot be fixed, there is no time left to fix it if they could!

Jesus is telling us exactly the same thing: The time is fulfilled! Time just ran out! God is at the door, everything is broken and you just ran out of time!

Keep in mind: Jesus was not talking about an event in the future. He spoke these words 2000 years ago! Time for you and me ran out 2000 years ago! There's much to repent of, but it's too late! We want to exclaim, "Wait! I'll do better next time!"

No, we won't

There is no next time! The time is fulfilled! Time's up!

Caught red handed with our pants down, Jesus says, "Believe the Good News!" What's good about it? We are faced with a problem so big we can't fix it and in the face of our repeated denial of that fact, there is no time left anyway!

The Good News is that Jesus just walked into the room and announced, "Time's up; The kingdom of God is here!" What we keep missing, ignoring or denying is the part where Jesus declares, "Ta-da - It's me! The brokenness is fixed! I fixed it because you cannot."

So, what is there to repent of this Lent?

In the very light of the forgiveness, the restoration of the brokenness, we continue to trample on the Gift and the Giver. We continue to function as though we can fix this. We continue to function as though we still have time. If either of these were true, we would not need a God of grace and mercy, we'd just need a God with a lot of patience, because eventually we'll get it right.

But here's the Good News Jesus was talking about:

- We are broken!
- We can't fix it!
- Times up!
- God just walked in the door!
- It's Jesus, and we were forgiven of all this a long time ago!

When we really, finally begin to grasp this, the truth comes with a rushing, tumbling simultaneous mix of heart break and joy that cannot be concealed.

Thanks be to God!

THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us humbly beseech God for his mercy upon the Church, the world, and one another.

A brief silence

Thank you, dear Father, for the examples of Abraham and of your dear Son. Thank you for their steadfast faith. Thank you for the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit, who kindles our faith and strengthens us in whatever trials and temptations we endure.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Purify your holy Church. When it is tempted by power, success, or convenience, turn its eyes to the Cross of your dear Son. By the power of your Spirit, keep it faithful in its proclamation of repentance, forgiveness, and the close approach of your Kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Purify and strengthen your persecuted people. Shield them from the temptation to forsake your Word. Keep them steadfast in faith and gentle in spirit. Help us, in our far smaller times of trial, to go and do likewise.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Purify and guide the people of this congregation. When we focus on peripheral matters, turn our eyes to Christ. Give us grace to prefer nothing whatsoever to him.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Purify and defend our youth. Strengthen them to resist the allure of popularity, dangerous pleasures, and anything that draws them away from loving and trusting you.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Purify and heal our sin-shadowed world. Let us not be seduced by promises or agendas that do not proceed from your holy will. Teach our earthly rulers that neither they nor their people can live on the bread of this world alone; they need the living Word that proceeds from you, the Lord of all nations.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Purify all first responders, and all medical and military personnel. Turn their eyes to you, their strength and their redeemer. Keep them faithful and honorable in all they do.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Purify and heal all who suffer and cry to you for help —especially: Dean Puffett, Richard Schlee, Dorothy Westendorf, Mary Rathe, Mary Ann Stegen, Delores Rodella, Mary Ann Helmrichs, Pr. Mel Harris, Pr. David Steffenson, and the VansCoy family. When they are tempted to despair, turn their eyes to the Cross, on which was hung the life and salvation of the whole world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Most holy Father, we commend into your keeping the lives of all who died trusting in your mercy. When we are tempted by doubt, confusion, fear, or pleasure, fix our eyes on Jesus, our hope and heart's desire. Fill us with your Spirit, and keep us safely on the path that leads to your eternal home and welcoming embrace. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**