



Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Genesis 9:8-17

^{9:8} Then God 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, ¹⁰ and 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. ¹¹ I 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." ¹² 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: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I 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. ¹⁶ When 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." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Commentary

The story of Noah and the Flood is one of the most familiar stories of the Bible, especially to children. But it is not a children's story. As the story goes, human wickedness had piled so high that God threw in the towel, made a new beginning, and forged a new covenant with the people. The covenant promised the maintenance of the natural order as long as earth endured, but this was not "forever." The passages interpret this covenant in the context of another day breaking in against human injustice and evil. This time judgment would not be merely an interruption of the natural order by flood, but the destruction of the natural order by the end of time.

Reflection

What is your response to the oppression, violence and abuse around our globe? How would the spirit of Jesus address this?

1 Peter 3:18-22

^{3:18} For Christ 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, ¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison ²⁰ who 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. ²¹ 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, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Commentary

The Flood story provides an interpretive framework for understanding the believer's situation. Noah obeyed God and thus his family was "saved through the waters" of the Flood; similarly, the believers have joined themselves to God (and removed themselves from a godless world) through baptism, which supports their plea for vindication and deliverance.

Reflection

From your perspective, how does this interpretation of the ark relate to your baptism?

Mark 1:9-15

^{1:9} In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And 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. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." ¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Commentary

Jesus returned to the desert to the villages of Galilee to preach the Good News. Note that the Christians did not invent the word "gospel"; rather, this term had been used to describe the ascension of the emperor Augustus. Jesus' message was an apocalyptic one: God's reign, which would succeed all earthly kingdoms, had come near (see Daniel 7 and Mark 13:14, 26). Now it was imminent. Its assumed proximity made the present time a critical opportunity for preparation by repentance and the renewal of righteousness in the land.

Reflection

How do you use the present time to prepare to meet Christ? Does this remain a living hope in your life?

Psalm 25:1-10

^{25:1} 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.

Closing Prayer

Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.