

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.



Intro

Welcome to Lent!

Over the years, Lent has gotten a bad reputation.

For a long time, people could only focus on our unworthiness, and the **Penitential** aspects of Lent – so it became a season of gloom and doom.

But it doesn't have to be that way at all – Lent is our time to put special focus on our preparation for the celebration of Easter.

It doesn't have to be a time of drudgery at all – in fact, it can actually be quite joyous.

As the proper preface we will use this season reminds us: *“You bid your faithful people cleanse their hearts and prepare with JOY for the Paschal feast; that, fervent in prayer and in works of mercy, and **renewed** by your Word and Sacraments, they may come to the fullness of grace which you have prepared for those who love you.”*

And the Scripture readings that we will hear throughout this season of Lent work to help us in our preparations for Easter.

The OT readings will focus on God's relationship with humanity and the covenants God makes again and again trying to establish that relationship, leading to God's greatest attempt at relationship in sending Jesus.

Our NT lessons are explanations of the meaning of the cross, or of our participation in salvation through Baptism.

And the Gospel readings begin with Mark telling of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness,

- and then continue with readings from Mark and John with predictions of Jesus' death on the cross and its meaning.

And so the great adventure begins once again as we join with Jesus in his journey to Jerusalem and all that awaits for him there.

So again, Welcome to Lent.

I. Noah and Baptism

A. We all know the story of Noah and the Ark.

1. Most of us have heard it from childhood.

- It is the subject of countless Sunday School lessons,
- and story books, and even toys.

2. Today's OT lesson is what happens after they get out of the Ark.

3. God makes a covenant with Noah and **all creation** that God will never again destroy the earth.

B. As I said a minute ago, our OT lessons this Lent will focus on the COVENANTS God made with God's people through history.

1. Covenants were promises or agreements reached between two people and were always sealed with a SIGN.

2. The Covenant between God and humanity could best be summed up as: "I will be your God, and you will be my people."

3. There are 5 major covenants between God and the people of Israel – each sealed with a sign.

4. They are: [Covenant / Sign]

- Adam – Creation
- Noah – more on that sign in a minute
- Abraham – Descendants – Isaac – next week
- Moses – the Law – following week
- David – Monarchy – his line will rule forever

C. In our OT reading today, we hear of God’s covenant with Noah – that God will not destroy the earth ever again.

1. God doesn’t want to destroy the earth – but to redeem it.

2. God seals the covenant with a sign – the rainbow:

- *“I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”*

3. God makes this covenant unconditionally, not only with humanity, but with all the creatures of the earth.

- And God repeats it – FOUR times
- Repeat in OT means to emphasize or underline something
- Four times means BIG, Bold, Underline, Capitalize

4. As a society and as individuals we have sinned;

- and yet, God has snatched us from death and made an **everlasting covenant** with us, by means of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus.

5. And that’s what the author of our NT lesson is trying to explain.

D. First Peter, scholars believe, is based on an early Baptismal homily preached to new converts, probably at the Easter Vigil.

1. The passage states that Jesus' death took place ONCE for the benefit of all.

2. The author uses the story of Noah – but in reverse;
- rather than being the method of DESTRUCTION **water** becomes the way of SALVATION through Baptism.

3. Just as the rainbow after the flood was a sign to Noah of God's faithfulness, the water of Baptism serves as a symbol of the New Covenant through the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

4. So then instead of destroying the world – God sends his Son to redeem the world;
- and we enter into that redemption through our Baptism.

5. As the Biblical Scholar, Reginald Fuller, reminds us: *“The whole purpose and climax of Lent is the renewal of our baptismal vows at the Easter Vigil.”*

6. So it is fitting that our Gospel Lesson begins at Jesus' baptism.

II. Gospel

A. Our Gospel reading may begin with Jesus' baptism – but right away, as quick as the next verse, we hear:

“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.”

1. The Greek word translated as “driven” could also be translated as “thrown.”

2. So after his baptism, Jesus is **immediately** thrown – HURLED if you will – into the wilderness.

3. Now, for Mark, the wilderness is not only a place of refreshment, but also a place of testing in preparation for God's saving actions.

B. Mark then proceeds to tell us what happened there:

1. *“He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.”*

2. That's it – ZIP – all of Lent in one verse.

3. But there's more going on here than meets the eye.

4. Mark is not concerned with the specifics of what happened in the wilderness between Jesus and Satan.

- Perhaps he didn't know

- Perhaps his readers already knew.

5. What Mark **IS** doing, is trying to show Jesus as the new Moses, the new Elijah, both of whom also struggled in the wilderness before beginning their work for God.

6. Then after he is strengthened by his time in the desert – Jesus is ready to begin his ministry as he returns to Galilee, proclaiming “the time is at hand.”

III. Lent and Us

A. We begin this Lent with themes of God's covenant with Noah, Baptism, and Jesus' time in the wilderness – but what does that have to do with us?

1. We also begin this Lent in a time of Pandemic.

2. In some ways, we've never left Lent from last year, we have had to give up so much – and had much taken away – not the least of which is the opportunity to gather together for worship.

3. So how do we focus on Lent when it seems like we are in a time of **perpetual Lent**?

4. Why should we? Isn't a year of Lent enough?

B. Again, we need to go back to basics – back to the purpose of Lent.

1. True, Lent does have its **PENITENTIAL** side from when – as we heard on Ash Wednesday – people were able to be reconciled with the Church for wrongs or offenses they may have committed.

2. And soon in a MIDIEVAL view of the world – everyone was sinful – everyone lived in fear of instant death and condemnation to hell – and so LENT became a time of Penitence and fasting, with even more focus on the wretchedness of the human condition.

3. “*We are unworthy,*” is not just a line from “Wayne’s World” it was the byline of generations – that was pounded into them by the Church and the rigors of Feudal Society.

4. Fortunately, we don’t live there anymore.

5. We now have a new appreciation for our relationship with the God who is LOVE – and who wants nothing more than to be in relationship with us.

6. That’s what the story of NOAH is about – God wanting to start anew – and God’s Covenant with Noah: “I will be your God and you will be my people” brought to its completion in the life – death – and resurrection of Jesus.

7. Which brings us back to the true purpose of LENT in our proper preface: “*You bid your faithful people cleanse their hearts and prepare with JOY for the Paschal feast; that, fervent in prayer and in works of mercy, and **renewed** by your Word and Sacraments, they may come to the fullness of grace which you have prepared for those who love you.*”

B. So how to live Lent in a time where the usual doesn’t apply?

1. I think our purpose goes back to that purpose – we ARE working to PREPARE to celebrate the gift of Easter – so we can still focus on our *Prayer life* and in living that our in *works of mercy*.

2. It is difficult to be “renewed by [God’s] Word and Sacraments” when we can only join together via a computer screen – but we can still focus on our prayer life – spend some extra time alone with God – as Jesus did in his 40 days.

3. Perhaps say the Morning or Evening Prayer or Compline each day – call a friend and set a time to do it together – or go online, or look on Facebook, there are plenty of places where you can join with others.

4. Or just spend some extra time in quiet and prayer like we talked about last week.

5. We can always work on our relationship with God – no matter the state of the pandemic.

B. So let LENT be a time to help with this.

1. Let LENT be for you that time of preparation in the wilderness.

2. Let LENT be that time of prayer and quiet with God, a time of strengthening your relationship with God.

3. Try giving up a little bit of what you want to do and spend that time with God.

4. Come to one of the extra services during Lent, or any of the other special offerings.

5. Set aside some time and walk the Labyrinth one day a week, spend the time walking in the fresh air and reflect on your own journey with God.

6. Let us use this Lent, not as a time of focusing on what's wrong with the world, but focusing on our own personal preparation – preparation for Easter – and living into our relationship with the God of Love.

7. May this Lent be our time of strengthening in the wilderness, that we may be made ready to undertake our ministries and carry them out into the world in whatever way we can.

Let Us Pray

Look with compassion , O Lord upon this your people; that, rightly observing this Holy Season, they may learn to know you more fully, and serve you with a more perfect will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN. (BOOS p. 24)