

# LENT I

## Year B

*This Bible study was written by Phillip Lienau, a seminarian at Church Divinity School of the Pacific.*

### Genesis 9:8-17

<sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>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: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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.” <sup>17</sup>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 from Phillip Lienau

The scale of this interaction between God and Noah is at once vast and intimate. We are reminded of the immensity of Creation, the multiplicity of life within it, and that, although this can stagger our comprehension, God is still beyond that. Yet God is in personal conversation with Noah, with an individual person. This is remarkable, that God so cares about us that God invites us to be in personal relationship with Godself, with God who is capable of cataclysm and mercy, who created the water and set rainbows in the sky.

Relationship requires more than one side. It is important that Noah does his part: Noah listens to God and does his best to live according to what he hears. God says that the rainbow is a sign to Godself, but it is also a reminder to Noah, and to us, that it matters to God when we listen. In today's collect, we pray that “each one find[s God] mighty to save.” Being in relationship with a mighty savior requires that we start with listening.

#### Discussion Questions

God works in both cosmic and minute ways. How have you seen God at work in the world, at the scale of the cosmos, and at the scale of your own day-to-day life?

God invites us into personal relationship with Godself. How are you practicing listening to God, and what might you do this Lenten season to deepen and strengthen your listening?

## Psalm 25:1-9

- <sup>1</sup> 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.
- <sup>2</sup> Let none who look to you be put to shame; \*  
let the treacherous be disappointed in their  
schemes.
- <sup>3</sup> Show me your ways, O Lord, \*  
and teach me your paths.
- <sup>4</sup> 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.
- <sup>5</sup> Remember, O Lord, your compassion and love,  
\*  
for they are from everlasting.
- <sup>6</sup> Remember not the sins of my youth and my  
transgressions; \*  
remember me according to your love  
and for the sake of your goodness,  
O Lord.
- <sup>7</sup> Gracious and upright is the Lord; \*  
therefore he teaches sinners in his way.
- <sup>8</sup> He guides the humble in doing right \*  
and teaches his way to the lowly.
- <sup>9</sup> All the paths of the Lord are love and  
faithfulness \*  
to those who keep his covenant and his  
testimonies.

### Commentary from Phillip Lienau

The Psalmist here articulates a posture of humility before God. The Psalmist puts “[their] trust” in God and asks God to show, teach, and lead them. We are assured that God is gracious and teaches sinners and the lowly.

It is important to distinguish between different stances of humility. The humility in this psalm does not come from an abject self-denial or condemnation; humility is not the same thing as humiliation. This humility is that of the student or one who is led. We, if we are willing to be shown, taught, and led, are indeed capable of following in the paths of the Lord that “are love and faithfulness.” In other words, we are capable of being who we are made to be, that is, people who “keep [God’s] covenant and his testimonies.” But the humility required is based in the remembrance that our capability to follow God comes *from* God, that any fortitude we possess is a gift.

### Discussion Questions

We are assured that God is a gracious teacher. What might God be teaching you in this season?

Fear and doubt can often hold us back from maintaining a stance of trusting humility before our loving and forgiving God. How have you experienced God’s love, in spite of ways in which you knew you fell short or missed the mark?

## 1 Peter 3:18-22

<sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup> 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 lives, were saved through water. <sup>21</sup> 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, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

### Commentary from Phillip Lienau

The season of Lent is an important time in the church to think about what baptism means, which this epistle connects to the time of Noah. In Noah's time, a posture of listening and faithful action in response to God's will is vital to relationship with God, and that is just as true for us as we reflect on our baptismal covenant. Just as Noah was not saved because he was somehow able on his own to withstand the flood, but instead was saved because of his relationship with God, so too are we not asked to be righteous on our own. Notice that we make our "appeal to God for a good conscience." The source of our good conscience is in God! Our salvation is based on our relationship with God, with Christ who "suffered... in order to bring [us] to God."

### Discussion Questions

Scriptures teach us about covenantal relationship with God. What is the nature of your personal covenantal relationship with God, and how might you reflect and act this Lenten season to be ever more reconciled with God?

Our salvation is in and through Christ. What does salvation in Christ mean to you here and now, and how might you proclaim this Good News by word and example?

## Mark 1:9-15

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

<sup>12</sup>And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup>He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God <sup>15</sup>and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

### Commentary from Phillip Lienau

The density of action in these seven verses is astounding. There are sharp contrasts: heavens are torn, but the Spirit descends like a dove; a voice comes from heaven with love and affirmation, but the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness where he is tempted by Satan; there are beasts and angels; John is arrested, but the good news is proclaimed. So it can be when we are alive to the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Two millennia ago, Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near,” and our faith is that that is just as true today as it was then. Yet note what he says next: “Repent, and believe in the good news.” Yes, we are living in the fulfilled time, but we have a part to play: We are called to repent and to believe. Both can be hard, and we may be sorely tempted to take some easier path that deflects true repentance or dilutes belief in the good news. We pray in the collect that God would “come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations.” This passage reminds us to be prepared for God’s help to sometimes lead to immediate action, and to deep and lasting transformation.

### Discussion Questions

Temptations can come in many forms, some as subtle subversions of faith and determination to persist in right relationship with God. How have you experienced temptations in your life, and how has God provided help?

Our baptism transforms us and calls us to ongoing transformation. How is God calling you to transformation today, in this Lenten season?