

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The Third Sunday after Trinity

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

Lessons:ⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Chapter of the First Book of Moses, called Genesis.ⁱⁱ

“And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.

“And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God

and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the seventeenth Verse of the third Chapter of the First Epistle General of St. Peter.ⁱⁱⁱ

“... For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “[G]od’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear 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 subject to him.^{iv} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

The story of Noah is the story of a new creation. As such it is a prototype of the Gospel, for, as St. Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The Old has passed away. Behold the new has come.”

The old creation started out well. In fact it was perfect. God rested on the seventh day because there was nothing left to be done. God drove back the waters of chaos and created the Garden of Eden. He created the original human family and gave it authority over the rest of the creation. He also gave it certain instructions: Be fruitful and multiply. Take care of the natural world. Eat the fruits and vegetables that I will provide for you. Just don’t try to rise above your place in the order of creation and don’t try to define good and evil for yourselves. The Bible says all of that much more poetically, but those were the essential instructions, the operator’s manual if you will, for the original creation.

When the instructions were disobeyed, everything began to come apart. Adam and Eve became estranged from each other and from God and from the animal world (represented by the serpent) and from the very earth itself, which began to produce weeds and thorns and require constant effort to make it productive.

The disintegration of the family, which began with the estrangement of Adam and Eve, continued with the murder of one of their sons by his brother.

Such is the nature of sin. One depravity leads to another, and a death spiral begins. If left unchecked, that spiral leads to total annihilation and the complete destruction of society. The result is a return to the dark watery void out of which the original creation emerged.

God allowed that to happen in the days of Noah, because when he gave man free will he also gave man the ability to destroy himself and his world. But even in allowing the release of the waters of judgment, God decided to preserve a single family with which he would begin to build the world again. Since animals were to be part of that new creation he preserved a core of animals as well.

In the course of forty days, all the sin and depravity of the old creation was washed away, and God once again drove back the waters. He released Noah's family together with the animals from the ark that had been their refuge and sent them into the reconstructed world with new instructions. Some of the instructions were the same as the old ones, but a few new ones were added.

I want to go over those instructions with you because they bear a striking relevance to some of the major controversies of our time. Let's take a look.

"Be fruitful and multiply." What does that say about gay unions, about birth control, and about abortion?

"The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea. Into your hand are they delivered." What do you suppose that says about our responsibility for wildlife management and the care of domestic animals?

"Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you." We don't have to be vegetarians any more.

"But the flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." That doesn't mean that we can't have our steaks rare. It means that the life of every creature belongs to God, even after it has

been killed. This is really a promise of resurrection, for animals as well as for us.

“Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” What do you think that says about the death penalty for murder? What do you think it says about abortion?

These instructions are intended for us because, being in Christ, we are part of God’s new creation.

The Apostles and the Fathers of the Church, especially the Eastern Fathers, consistently interpret Old Testament stories metaphorically. The Flood represents the waters of baptism, by which we are cleansed from original sin. We emerge from those waters as new creatures, “born again”, as St. John puts it.

The ark represents the Church in which we are sheltered from the chaos and death of the old creation. The story of Noah, thus becomes a prophecy, a foreshadowing of the work of Jesus Christ.

The Second Lesson for today takes up that theme. It is a little confusing in the King James Version so let me read from the Revised Standard one: “Baptism, which corresponds to this [flood], now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

The death and resurrection of Christ accomplish the same purpose as the flood, so there is no need for God ever to destroy the earth with water again. Accordingly, the rainbow may be seen as a sign of the atoning work of Christ.

The instructions given to Noah are intended to guide human behavior in the new creation. They are amplified and expanded by Jesus in what we call The Sermon on the Mount. I’m not going to go over those amplified instructions with you now because this sermon is long enough already. I’ll get to them at another time, but you can read them for yourself in St. Matthew, beginning with Chapter Five. I will point out, however, that The Sermon on the Mount concludes with a note of judgment that reflects the great flood.

The point is that, as part of God's new creation, begun with Noah and completed in Jesus, we who are being saved, which is to say we who are in the Church, are instructed by God to live according to different standards than those observed by the world around us. We can expect, as Noah was and as Jesus was, to be mocked and ridiculed for that.

St. Peter wrote in a time not unlike ours, when the Church was surrounded by what he calls "Gentiles". He really means pagans. "Living," as he puts it, "in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry." "They are surprised," says the Apostle, "that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you, but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

So here is the Apostle's advice: "Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you into account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence, and keep your conscience clear so that when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

Finally, to sum all this up, I leave you with the words of St. Paul with which I began: "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold the new has come."

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
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ⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ *Genesis* 9:1-17 (KJV).

ⁱⁱⁱ *I St. Peter* 3:17—4:6 (KJV).

^{iv} *I Peter* 20-22 (RSV).