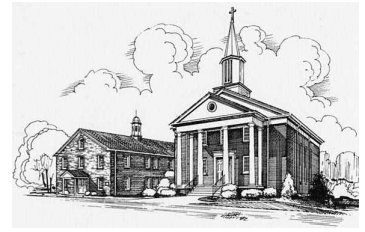


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the  
First Sunday in Lent

Year B



Genesis 9:8-17

Psalm 25:1-9

Mark 1:9-15

The Collect

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Genesis 9:8-17

God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 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. 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.” 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: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 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. 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.” 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.”

Psalm 25:1-9 Page 614, BCP

*Ad te, Domine, levavi*

- 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 compassion 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 goodness, 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.

**Mark 1:9-15**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

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



## SERMON

Mark is sometimes described as a passion narrative with an extended introduction. The other Gospels are like the sports reporter who has studied the stats of every player and can recite them flawlessly. Mark is like watching the game. The “game” we watch with Mark is played out over the Paschal Triduum – the three days beginning with the evening of Maundy Thursday, and ending at evening on Easter, and it’s deadly. During Lent, we prepare ourselves for this three day period. The degree of preparation you will need to ready yourself for the Paschal Triduum depends entirely on how involved with the events you choose to become.

Sounds odd to say it that way, doesn't it? But it is accurate. Each of us decides how involved with the Easter story we are willing to become. The range of these choices is enormous. When I was a kid, my involvement

with Easter was to receive a chick dyed (usually) blue from Eagles Five and Dime. Each kid got a chick which conveniently died from being dyed at about the same time we lost interest in the chick. That, and dinner at Granny Schneider's, was our involvement with Easter.

What a remarkable confession I just made! Jesus, a Jew from Galilee, living in an occupied country, had the *chutzpah* to confront the compromises that the indigenous leaders had made with the occupying force – the compromises that served to grant legitimacy to the Roman policy of victimizing those least able to protect themselves by varnishing over that victimization with assurances of God's approval. Jesus did this, knowing that it would result in his death under horrible circumstances, his skin flayed from his back, hanged on a cross naked, nails driven into his flesh, and my family's response was to give a chick pneumonia by dying it blue,

then go to dinner at Grandma's house.

It's exceptional, but true, that the degree of involvement we choose to accept in the story is a personal decision. You must choose. Don McLean, the guy who wrote and sang "The Day the Music Died" wrote another lyric nobody paid as much attention to. He said, "The More you Pay, the More It's Worth". He's right about that. We choose what to value. We choose what to invest our hearts in, and how much. The degree of involvement with the Paschal Triduum you experience is your choice, but the more you pay, the more it's worth.

This is not embraced by many, many people today simply because it demands a choice. I hear a lot of people saying that their goal is to keep themselves "open" to spiritual experience, and that since all spiritual experience, all religious forms, offer things of value, they are at pains to remain receptive to all that is offered them.

As it happens, I agree with almost all of that. I find wisdom in the oddest places, and they are not always Christian places. I am influenced by the writings of the Dali Lama. I find great light in Buddhist writings, and books on Tao have always fascinated me. There is much of value in all of life and you would be foolish to turn your back upon it just because it isn't bound in black calfskin with a gold cross on the front of it.

Conceding that much, however, isn't the same as giving my heart. My involvement with Lent is as it is because I choose to involve myself with Lent and I so choose because I have given my heart to this story. This story is my story. This story is the lens through which I view my relationship to God.

That's the way I roll, but I'd have to be seriously loony to imagine that everybody has given their hearts to the same things I have. To many, many people in our

world, the story of the Paschal Triduum is not accessible. They are immune to the story of a man suffering so much, so long ago. Perhaps there is sadness in their lives, and just the burden of dealing with their own sadness leaves them no resources to be empathetic about the story of the Paschal Triduum. Perhaps, they are distracted by the shiny things of this world such that they cannot feel this story with compassion. Perhaps they are just the Cool Kids and it isn't cool to hang around churches mentally joining yourself with something that happened so long ago. You're only a cool kid if you do what the other cool kids do and this most certainly isn't one of the things the cool kids do.

All the cool kids out there have iPhones, and we have Lent. All the cool kids are going to see Star Wars 3D, and we're sulking around deciding what we're going to give up for Lent. All the cool kids made out like

bandits at the President's Day sales, and we have dust upon our faces.

Ashes are an ancient symbol of mourning. When we bear the imposition of ashes, we proclaim that we are in mourning. We mourn for our own mortality. We mourn for our stubborn sinfulness which makes such an awful sacrifice necessary. And we mourn by placing upon us the ashes made from the palms of last Palm Sunday, signifying that the joy of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, which we will celebrate on Palm Sunday, will turn to ashes at the cross. Giving our hearts to these old rituals connects us with the events, but what we do is utterly inaccessible to the cool kids who are unable to emotionally bridge the distance between the people and circumstances then, and the land of privilege in which we live.

The people with whom Jesus interacted lived in a time and a place where hope was a rarely encountered

commodity. Jesus said to them, “Have hope for I am with you always.” The cool kids in America live in a time and a place when hope is unnecessary. If the cool kids want a 52” plasma, they can have a 52” plasma with no money down, no payments until 2024, and no interest until the sun explodes. Who needs hope and the encouragement of Jesus when the game is in HD?

And so, we begin Lent and the cool kids snicker at us if they notice us at all. We are oddities, church. What is wrong with us? The whole country is zooming along on the blacktop in air conditioned comfort, listening to Pandora on their blue tooth, and here we go, clip, clop, clopping along on the rocky path, with gravel in our sandals, dirty-faced Christians deliberately turning our backs on the comfort and plenty in which we live. For what? Eat! Drink! Be merry! The Grand Buffet is all-you-can-eat. We live in a blessed land!

Are we just naturally gloomy people, or is there something deeper going on? Since I raised the question, I bet you can guess which answer I favor. There is something deeper going on. We mourn because we are condemned to view the sacrifice of Jesus through eyes of compassion. We mourn because we know that it is human frailty which makes this sacrifice necessary, and not just in the abstract. We mourn because we know that it is our frailty which makes this sacrifice necessary. We mourn because once we have been forced to make that confession, we cannot ignore it, get a clean plate for subsequent servings at the Grand Buffet and go back to the way we were.

In the Fourth Century, in the year 361, a new emperor was named in Rome. His name was Flavius Claudius Iulianus, but he is known to history as Justin Apostate. He was one of the people immune to the story we tell as

Christians, although he was a member of Rome's first Christian Dynasty. Justin Apostate dedicated himself to preservation of the empire by bringing back traditional Roman values and Roman religion, and placing severe limits on the practice and teaching of Christianity. Justin Apostate was the last pagan emperor of Rome.

Here is his outburst against Christianity:

These impious Galileans not only feed their own poor, but ours also; welcoming them into their agapae, they attract them, as children are attracted, with cakes. Whilst the pagan priests neglect the poor, the hated Galileans devote themselves to works of charity, and by a display of false compassion have established and given effect to their pernicious errors. See their love-feasts, and their tables spread for the indigent. Such practice is common among them, and causes a contempt for our gods.

Yes, in 361 A.D. we turned our back on the easy course laid out by the Emperor and fed the Empire's

poor. In 2012, we turn our back on the plasma TVs and bear upon our foreheads the mark of the ashes, saying as we do so, that the compassion we have learned through the ministry of Jesus allows us to mourn the unnecessary pain that is the consequence of human sin. Suffering with Jesus, we cannot return to comfort until God's children are comforted.

I have some more gloomy news, church. The world, as a general rule, will not turn from their plasma TV's and Grand Buffet to share your mourning with you. Instead, you will mostly be tolerated, or become the butt of jokes. I remember one attorney coming into court bearing the ashes. Several bailiffs helpfully pointed out to him that he had something on his forehead. They had no idea why he would do something like that.

I know that the world will not turn from their plasma TV's and the Grand Buffet to share your mourning with

you because if the world could feel the compassion of Jesus, there would be no need for Christians. If the world could feel the suffering of those who are forgotten, those who have been bypassed, the socially crippled, the educationally bereft, the hungry, the unfilled, there would be no suffering for all the world would come to their aid.

The world will not do so, church, and so it falls to us to feed those who hunger, to ease the suffering of those who cry out. And it falls to us to encourage and strengthen each other in this task, as it has always done. Paul wrote his church at Thessaloníki

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

So we must do, as well, for the time of Lent can be harrowing. We've been reminded countless times that without the Crucifixion, there can be no Resurrection.

Without the death, the real, unavoidable, unquestionable death of Jesus Christ upon a cruel cross, there would be nothing left of Easter but bunny rabbits. It is precisely because the Resurrection is the central mystery of our faith that we do everything we can do during Lent to make that death as real as possible to us, and we begin it by a period of mourning.

May this Lenten season bring you into closer communion with your God. May His blessings, to be poured out and lifted up on Easter refresh and renew your spirit. May your walk with Him in these days of Lent bind your life to the grace of God the Son, the Love of God the Father and the Communion of God the Holy Spirit.

AMEN