

1st Sunday of Lent - 21st Feb 2021

Gen 9:8-17; Ps 25:1-9; 1Peter 3:18-end Mark 1:9-15

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

Psalms 25:1-9 : To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. ²O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. ³Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. ⁴Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. ⁵Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. ⁶Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. ⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD! ⁸Good and upright is the LORD; therefore, he instructs sinners in the way. ⁹He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

1Peter 3 :18-end ¹⁸For 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, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who 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. ²¹And 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, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Mark 1:9-15 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved with you I am well pleased.” ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. ⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

*'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you O Lord,
my rock and my redeemer.'*

*'Sometimes, in the smallest details of our day, God reveals the greatest depths of His love
-in ways only His heart and ours understand.'* [Calendar quotation 12th February]

I have been binge watching a TV series called 'This is US'. It shares one family's lives through its different ages and stages, so the audience understands why each character does what they do and says what they say. Those around them have no idea why they are acting strangely or saying such crazy things...but the audience know and therefore stay silent, because they know.

What a fascinating idea! Is this I wonder, what God does? God knows why we do and say what we do and say because He has been intimately entwined with our lives since we were born. So, not only because we are known but also unconditionally loved, God remains silent. ...because God knows.

Jesus experienced his Father's silence in the Wilderness, straight after hearing His voice at the Jordan. Jesus dug deep to explain this during the rest of his ministry. Mostly he used storytelling and picture images. Jesus knew God was, and is, never silent but how was he to tell people that it is the quality of the listening and the myriad ways of tuning in to his Father that human beings had got so wrong, even from the beginning?

Something to take to heart are these words from Isaiah 55:8 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.' I find it so helpful to hear that I do not have to understand God. I do however need to respond to that challenge and tune in.

God's thoughts and ways can be found but they are not always where I am looking or listening. I do need to turn round to see and to hear. I need to **glimpse** the bigger picture, the whole spider's web, the complete jigsaw or the near-perfectly finished tapestry, with all of my heart, my mind and my strength.

There is a way of looking into Bible stories using the spiritual practice of Lectio Divina. This practice places you within the Bible story, enacting it as the Living, Breathing Word of God. You can ask God to help you see details previously missed.

Imagine, for example, that you are walking through an ART Gallery. Four pictures have captured not only your attention, but also your heart. You are silent before them. What do they offer you? [You may wish to make a note of your immediate responses and then ask God to show you something new.]

The first picture is an artist's image of the Noah's Ark story. Close your eyes and see the one you remember from childhood or from the Bible Story just read.

What jumps out at you?

Is God there? [Go with your instinctive response on this one.]

The next three pictures are of St. Mark's startling rush to reveal his themes of baptism, temptation and preaching in order to focus our attention on the last sentence.

So, the second picture which has captured your heart, is of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan.

What jumps out for you?

Is God there?

The third picture is of Jesus being literally thrown into the Wilderness to be tempted by Satan, to spend time with wild animals, and be ministered to by angels.

*What jumps out for you?
Is God there?*

The fourth picture is full of emotion as, in the background, John has been put in jail while Jesus is striding out to preach saying: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."*

*What jumps out for you?
Is God there?*

God may have seemed absent from those Gallery images. This could be showing us we need to see differently, to hear new things, to tune in for clarity. [From Thursday 25th February for four weeks you can check this out in the National Art Gallery's Lent course images.]

I wonder, do you ever think of God as waiting patiently? In Peter's letter, the reading we have not heard today, it says: 'God waited patiently in the days of Noah'. If God's patience lasted for Noah, continued when Jesus was on earth and continues still, God's thoughts and ways really are not ours. Does this thought release us from worrying about the future by turning our focus to the here and now, the rainbow after the flood?

So, as in the words of a famous song... 'Don't worry 'bout a ting, 'cos every little ting's gonna be alright...' we are ultimately showing trust in the patient silence of God. In my experience, this patient silence not only accepts but encourages happiness and sadness, crying without stopping, feeling both devastated and bereft. Because God's thoughts and ways are not mine however, I believe I will finally see my trust was placed where Genesis foresaw...in the rainbow of God's covenant love.

*'Sometimes, in the smallest details of our day, God reveals the greatest depths of His love
-in ways only His heart and ours understand.'*

Prayer for the Day: God of trackless desert, whose Son walked untamed in league with beasts and spirits, whose kingdom is not distant but breaking in among us: give us time and space to find a new identity, to let go of control and walk the pilgrim way; through Jesus Christ, the good news of salvation. Amen.

'You raise me up' sung by Selah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DorNUsi5LE> start at 50 and end at 4.48

When I am down and oh my soul, so weary
When troubles come and my heart burdened be
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence
Until you come and sit awhile with me

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders
You raise me up, to more than I can be

Brief interlude – enjoy the images

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains

You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas

I am strong, when I am on your shoulders

You raise me up, to more than I can be

There is no life

No life without its hunger

Each restless heart beats so imperfectly

But when you come, I am filled with wonder

Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains

You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas

I am strong, when I am on your shoulders

You raise me up, to more than I can be

You raise me up, to more than I can be