

Homily for the First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 9:8-15

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15

It's very possible that people are more familiar with the rainbow Judy Garland sang about in the Wizard of Oz than they are with the rainbow in the story of the flood and Noah's ark. Dorothy's rainbow and Noah's rainbow are, of course, different but they both relate to natural disasters: a flood for Noah, a tornado for Dorothy, and both are signs of promise and hope.

Of course, Dorothy's rainbow is the stuff of lullaby promises, pointing somewhere over the ordinary, to a place where skies are blue; where troubles melt like lemon drops; and dreams that you dare to dream really do come true. Noah's rainbow, on the other hand, isn't one you need to cross beyond to "somewhere over" there. Rather, Noah's rainbow covenants us *right where we are*, here and now, with the One who promises to be with us through storms, floods and whatever upsets and disasters come our way: God promising that even death will not have the final word. The rainbow in Genesis is a sign of a covenant between God and us, God who promises to be with us, in good times and in the worst of times.

What floods deluge our lives today?
World peace is undermined by terrorism and war.
Our environment is threatened not by a global flood but by our abuse of the natural world.
A downward spiraling economy makes the ground beneath our steps shaky.
Illness and personal problems take hold of our bodies and spirits.

In the floods of such waters where's the ark for us?
Who, like Noah, will gather us to a safe place to ride out the storms?
What will keep us from drowning in it all?

We need to look for the rainbow,
the sign of God's promise to be with us even and especially in the hardest of times.

Might that not be a good way to understand Lent?
A season, a whole season
for letting the storms and floods within and around us *subside...*
a season of looking for God to be revealed in beauty,

like a rainbow, a light in the sky,
piercing the clouds,
and bridging the gap between our fears and problems
and the Lord's promise of protection...

Our faith doesn't make the storms disappear or the waters subside.
Rather, faith provides the ark for riding out the flood,
and offers a rainbow's beauty as a sign,
a reminder of God's faithful love.

Prayer in Lent might be our ark:
a place of refuge in the midst of turmoil.
Fasting in Lent might help us hunger
for that faith that keeps our heads above the flood waters.
Serving the poor in Lent
is a way of being Noah, of being the ark
for those in need of our generosity
and in need of a sign of God's abiding fidelity.

A rainbow arcing over this first week of Lent is a strong image
for the relationship this season calls us to deepen
in the forty days ahead.

And of course,
there's a lot of speculation about what one might find
at the end of a rainbow:
a pot of gold for leprechauns and bluebirds for Dorothy.
But on our end of the rainbow stretching between God and us
is the Lord's table, the altar of the greatest covenant
sealed in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross,
a covenant pledging peace
and, here in the Eucharist, offering us the promise of life.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*