



## Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent, February, 2021

### Repent and Believe

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

[Genesis 9:8-17](#), [1 Peter 3:18-22](#), [Mark 1:9-15](#), [Psalm 25:1-9](#)

Lord, give us the discipline that we need to listen to your word with hearts and minds wide open; so that we may repent and believe in the good news.

Thank you all for your prayers for the clergy retreat held earlier this month by Zoom. I know Zoom isn't everyone's favorite, but I appreciated not having to drive anywhere, dining on the usual schedule with my favorite dinner partner, and sleeping in my own comfy bed. I did not feel compelled to color or assemble puzzles. I was glad to finish several books that I had set aside. And, while I missed the interpersonal collegiality, the small group discussions were satisfying. I hope you are finding that true with the programs offered at St. Luke's this Lent. You might also enjoy the check-in we used to open our retreat as a personal assessment. The acronym is PIES:

P = how are you feeling physically?

I = how are you doing intellectually?

E = how are you emotionally?

S = how are you spiritually?

P-I-E-S is easy to remember, but it's OK to do them in any order and use any or all. (Some of you are wondering if "none" is OK – Yes, it is. After all, it's your assessment.)

Today's readings are connected by themes of water as a cleansing force, repentance (literally turning from evil/sin), and promises/covenants. I wondered how PIES might apply to the main subjects of these readings.

Noah lived in a world filled with sin and violence. God waited patiently for the evildoers to come around and they did not. How difficult it must have been for Noah, a righteous man, to be surrounded by people who scoffed and derided him, even as he was telling them what would happen if they did not repent.

How mentally and physically challenging it would have been to precisely follow God's instructions; to build the ark and gather the animals and their food.

We remember from Sunday School that God caused it to rain for 40 days, but if you read Genesis chapters 6-8, Noah and his family were on the ark with all the animals for over a year! God at last delivered them all and in the aftermath of the great flood, Noah and his family, as well as the animals onboard, must have been grateful to be freed from confinement in the ark.

In all the decades I have been listening to this story, for the first time I heard that the rainbow was a reminder for God to remember the promise that the world would never again be destroyed by a flood. God said, "I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." Mother earth is included as an entity within God's covenant along with the birds, beasts and people. Did you notice that God's

covenant is with “all living flesh” and not with humans only? Did you notice that there was no quid-pro-quo from God? What do you think of when you see a rainbow?

We read this morning from the first letter of Peter. Some scholars believe that Mark’s Gospel is actually an early memoir of the Apostle Peter, written as Mark scribed Peter’s preaching. Mark is the earliest and briefest of the four gospels; missing many of our favorite bible stories and characters; yet what is there is rich and compelling, as I’m sure you are discovering with the NT Wright bible study.

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee...” Jesus walked 65-70 miles from Nazareth to be baptized in the Jordan River by his older cousin, John the Baptist. Jesus must have been physically exhausted; hot, dusty and tired.

One hallmark of Mark’s writing is the use of action words: immediately (8X), suddenly (X5), at once (X4). In Mark, after Jesus baptism, the heavens are torn apart... the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. In Matthew, the heavens are “opened” and Jesus is “led by the Spirit into the wilderness.”

But “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.” HE saw. HE heard a voice from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” What child would not thrill to hear that affirmation?! From that emotional high, 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.” Mark doesn’t elaborate on specific temptations but we know [Matthew 4:1-11] that Jesus defeated each challenge from Satan using scriptures from the Torah, which he knew well! Jesus was prepared for adversity; for these trials. Jesus was tested and he prevailed.

One of the books I finished during the retreat was The Four Vision Quests of Jesus by The Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston, a retired Episcopal Bishop of Alaska and a Choctaw. In the introductory chapter, he writes that his book “offers a Christian theology [that is] based on Native tradition, on the original Covenant God made with ... the Native people of this continent.” Jesus first vision quest [chapter 6] is “The Wilderness.” In the Native interpretation, Satan is not a separate being. “The devil is within ... because the universal nature of evil is within all of us.” The ego, the “trap of self, the temptation to put one’s own needs over the needs of the community ... [is] a pathway to deep spiritual error.” Jesus, fully aware of this, refuses to take that path and he denies himself physical comfort, privilege, wealth and power.

“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.’”

As Jesus was tested, so are we. Let us, to the best of our abilities, proclaim the good news; the Way of Love - with our lips and in our lives; putting the needs of our community and our neighbors ahead of our own. Amen.