

First Sunday in Lent
Cycle B RCL
Revised

Genesis 9:8-17

This story comes from the pen of the so-called Priestly Writer (P) who wrote during the Exile in Babylon (586-538 BCE). In general, P enlarges narrative accounts of Genesis with legal commentary; and in this passage, P conceives of the new situation following the great Flood as deriving from a *covenant* between God and Noah. Covenants were ancient treaties executed between nations, and P consistently views the relationship between God and the world and between God and Israel as resting upon such treaty relationships. The new covenant with Noah, the second Adam, so P believes, replaced the covenant with the first Adam (Genesis 1:28-30). God's specific treaty obligation of this second covenant is not to destroy living beings with a flood again.

Psalm 25:1-9

Laments are prayers that ask for God's help in time of trouble. They may be songs that admit wrongdoing as a reason for the trouble or insist upon the writer's innocence. In the present psalm, the psalmist admits having committed sin but argues that God should forgive that sin out of compassion (vss. 5-6, 15), faithfulness to the covenant (vs. 9), and for the sake of God's public reputation ("name," vs. 10).

1 Peter 3:18-22

An unknown Christian of the late first or early second century wrote this epistle in the name of the Apostle Peter. Some interpreters consider it a baptismal sermon because of our passage that discusses the saving power of Baptism (3:21). A few commentators have found remnants of early Christian hymns in 3:18 and 3:22. The distinction between "flesh" and "spirit" (3:18) is much like the distinction in Paul where "flesh" stands for our mode of being in this present, evil age, and "spirit" refers to our mode of being in the age to come. Researchers do not agree on the identity of the disobedient "spirits in prison" of verses 19-20. Could they be the sons of the gods who disobeyed in Genesis 6:1-4? The last word has not been uttered on this topic.

Mark 1:9-15

Christians are so used to talking about the Holy Spirit that they sometimes fail to understand the surprise ancient Jewish readers would have felt to have the Spirit be the divine agent in Jesus' baptismal vision and his subsequent testing in the wilderness. Jews in Jesus's time believed the Spirit had ceased from Israel and would return only with the Messiah. Mark's seemingly offhanded reference to the Spirit tells the reader of the author's belief that the Age of the Messiah (Hebrew: *olam ha-mashiach*) has begun. Note that it is this dove-like Spirit that "throws him [Jesus] out" (*ekballei*) into the wilderness for "testing." Mark gives no content to Jesus's "testing" in the wilderness; only Matthew and Luke mention actual satanic enticements. Perhaps for Mark mere survival in the Judean wilderness for forty days was "testing" enough. The English translation "temptation" (verse 13) is too weak to fit either the circumstances or the usual meaning of the Greek word *peirazomenos*. The Greek word can refer to such things as the testing of metals to determine their nature and seldom if ever refer merely to an urge to do something wrong.