

February 21st Worship  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent

### **Introduction to the Day**

On Ash Wednesday the church began its journey toward baptismal immersion in the death and resurrection of Christ. This year, the Sundays in Lent lead us to focus on five covenants God makes in the Hebrew Scriptures and to use them as lenses through which to view baptism. First Peter connects the way God saved Noah's family in the flood with the way God saves us through the water of baptism. The baptismal covenant is made with us individually, but the new life we are given in baptism is for the sake of the whole world.

### **Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✠ one God,  
the keeper of the covenant,  
the source of steadfast love,  
our rock and our redeemer.

**Amen.**

God hears us when we cry, and draws us close in  
Jesus Christ. Let us return to the one who is full of  
compassion.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

Fountain of living water,

**pour out your mercy over us.**

**Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free.**

**Rebuild what we have ruined  
and mend what we have torn.**

**Wash us in your cleansing flood.**

**Make us alive in the Spirit**

**to follow in the way of Jesus,**

**as healers and restorers of the world you so love.**

**Amen.**

Beloved, God's word never fails.

The promise rests on grace:

by the saving love of Jesus Christ,

the wisdom and power of God,

your sins are ✠ forgiven, and God remembers them  
no more.

Journey in the way of Jesus.

**Amen.**

### **Prayer of the Day**

Holy God, heavenly Father, in the waters of the flood you saved the chosen, and in the wilderness of temptation you protected your Son from sin. Renew us in the gift of baptism. May your holy angels be with us, that the wicked foe may have no power over us, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **Lesson – Genesis 9:8-17**

<sup>8</sup>God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>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: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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.” <sup>17</sup>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.”

## **Gospel – Mark 9:2-9**

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

<sup>12</sup>And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup>He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

### **Message**

People of God, grace to you and peace from God, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I am in a text message group with colleagues of mine and being pastors is, obviously, one of the things we have in common. Earlier this week on Wednesday, one of those colleagues messaged the rest of us wishing us a “Happy Ash Wednesday.” Reading that message, my mind immediately went to another thing that this group of colleagues has in common, and that thing is GOLF.

You see, we have a tradition that we block out the Monday after Easter, because we are a hopeful optimistic bunch, and we believe that by the Monday after Easter, April 5<sup>th</sup> this year, golf courses will be open. SO, we hold out hope that we will be able to be out there and we will be golfing. And reading, “Happy Ash Wednesday,” my mind immediately went to the fact that the next season of the church year will be the next time I golf.

You're probably wondering by now, “what on God's green earth, or God's snow covered earth, does that have to do with this gospel text?” That is a very fair question to ask. We have in this gospel text the events leading up to the beginning of Jesus ministry. The first event is, as we hear, his baptism. And we now realize that this is a Gospel that we have heard not too long ago.

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan and just as he's coming up out of the water the heavens are torn apart and the spirit descended on him like a dove.” This Gospel text has Jesus at a pretty high peak on the rollercoaster of life.

For Jesus and for us as people of faith, when we think of our baptism, that is about the height of wholeness. I didn't intend to expound upon our journey towards wholeness, but here we are, as we think of our journey towards wholeness, our baptism is when we are about as whole, as a people of God, as we can be.

So Jesus, in his baptism is very high on the wholeness scale. Immediately after hearing “you are my son, my beloved, with you I am well pleased,” the Spirit “immediately drove him out to wilderness” and we start to see, he comes down.

The wilderness, the low of the rollercoaster, can go on for some time. We don't know how long we are in this wilderness journey, but Jesus, in the wilderness, “the angels waited on him” and he starts to come back up. He starts to make his way back up out of that valley low, and he enters the beginning of his Galilean. Ministry.

Now, if you've ever started something new, most things that start new, start with a sense of hope.

They start with a sense of promise.

They start with a sense of excitement.

Even if it's a new thing that we are thrust into that we didn't want to be in, again in that newness there is hope.

So our roller coaster of where we are in this journey towards wholeness starts to tick back upwards.

And now the beginning of Jesus Galilean ministry starts 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."

Now, I imagine Jesus' rollercoaster here starts to tick on downward. But, on its way downward, Jesus realizes something. Because when he's here at the start of his Galilean ministry, at the beginning of that new thing, dwelling in the hope and the promise that is there, he realizes something.

Again, we talked about this not long ago. He realizes he can't do it on his own. So in the midst of it's tick on downward, Jesus says, "pause, I'm going to get people to help me. I'm going to get people who are going to be on this journey towards wholeness with me." And I believe his roller coaster starts to tick on upward again.

What does that all have to do with golf? And what does that all have to do with this group of clergy colleagues that I have that when I received a "happy Ash Wednesday" text message from one of them, I immediately thought of the next time we'll golf.

Baptism is hopeful. We know the promise and the hope that we find in baptism. And in that, in thinking of that promise, we find hope. We find hope that gets us through these moments. The moments that as we think about and get into the season of lent, as we work our way down the rollercoaster and into the wilderness, and we find ourselves in that season of Lent, in a season of wonder

And a season of questioning

and a season of self-exploration

and bringing ourselves closer to God

and in life, that Valley may take a long time.

But.

We know that hope comes again in the newness and the new things that we start to realize are going to happen. There is hope in newness. There's hope in what may be. There is hope in what is to come. There is excitement.

Because.

In this season of Lent, and like a golf game, some of these peaks and valleys may be a bit more frequent. But we eventually come to where this journey is taking us. And, where is that? Easter. And, what is Easter? New life.

This is a rollercoaster journey for us. That as we have put away our metaphorical golf clubs, or lawn equipment, or whatever it may be that you have to put away because of this winter season, we've started this Lent journey. We start this lent journey, some of us but certainly not all, at a rollercoaster high.

Lent brings us down that rollercoaster and into a time of self-reflection and introspection, looking inward and bringing ourselves closer to God, that we would one day start coming back up.

Now for Jesus, and for us – and for why the prospect of golf for me is so hopeful – is because of the people. It's because of the people and the community that I have around a golf game. The time that we spend together is time spent with people we care about. The metaphorical golf game, for you, is perhaps that outdoor activity that you have to give up. Maybe gardening, or swimming, or boating, or fishing, whatever it may be, it's that thing that find when you're experiencing that activity. For me with golf it is the community.

In this time when the golf clubs are put away and that wilderness low creeps up on us, and we start to come back out of it, feeling that hope and newness again, it's the promise and the prospect of spending that time, doing that thing you love to do, with those people that you love to do them with.

Jesus in this Gospel text, in the early stages of his ministry, realizes he's not going to be able to do these things on his own. And while he was maybe feeling a rollercoaster high as he started his Galilean ministry, he realized he couldn't do it on his own. He realized he was going to need to surround himself with people that he was going to enjoy doing these things with.

The very next story that will come in Mark's Gospel has Jesus calling his first disciples. He knows that he's going to need to surround himself with people who are life-giving. He knows he will need people who will help carry this ministry to where and to whom it needs to be carried to.

So, as we go about this Lenten journey, our journey towards wholeness, we know that this wilderness time is going to come. We know that this wilderness time may last for a long time. Perhaps even longer than the 40 days of the season of Lent.

But

We also know, because we are an Easter people, that this wilderness time will end. We know that this time of wandering and wondering, the unknown, will end and we will eventually make our tick back up the rollercoaster. Because in this rollercoaster that we live as a people of faith, an Easter people, we know what's coming, and we know that it is the new life that we find in Christ.

So, people of God, with our ashen crosses still somewhat present this first Sunday of the Season of Lent, we are reminded of our eventual death, but we are also reminded the God has surrounded us with people, a community, that accompanies us on our journey towards wholeness.

As that community we go towards this eventual promise and new life that we find at Easter. My prayer for you this Lent season is that you would find that communal wholeness. I pray that, as you explore yourself through our daily devotions, through our midweek worship, and as you explore your relationship with God, you also explore your relationship with yourself, your friends, your family, and your community, a community of faith, but much larger than that.

I pray that you would know that we are not alone on this roller coaster of a life that is a life of faith – that we go about this together, one day coming to that roller coaster stop at the mountain peak that is eternal life.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

**Apostle's Creed**

## **Prayers**

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

In Jesus your realm has come near to us in every place and time. Give your church throughout the world a spirit of humility and repentance; teach us to trust always in the good news of your salvation. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You have made a covenant of mercy with every living creature. Protect all the earth's creatures from destruction. Empower the work of biologists, conservationists, and science educators. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

All your paths are steadfast love and faithfulness. Direct the words and actions of leaders in our community and throughout the world, that they may maintain justice for the lowly. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Even in the wilderness you are with us. Walk alongside migrants and refugees crossing dangerous lands. Tend to those whose lives feel desolate. Give healing and strength to all who suffer whom we name now both silently and aloud. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

In the covenant of baptism you claim us as beloved children. Nurture us in our baptismal identity and teach us to live within it for the sake of others. Strengthen this congregation's ministries of care and concern. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

In baptism you join us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We praise you for all those who have died trusting in your faithfulness. Bring us with them to the fullness of your reign. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **Offering**

In addition to our 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Well Offering / Mission Offering going to Chippewa Valley causes as suggested by you, we will be collecting a special offering for the month of February to go towards supply needs for Personal Protective Equipment for our companion synod in Malawi's fight against COVID.

## **Offertory Prayer**

Faithful God,

you walk beside us in desert places, and you meet us in our hunger with bread from heaven. Accompany us in this meal, that we may pass over from death to life with Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

## **Lord's Prayer**

### **Blessing**

You are what God made you to be:  
created in Christ Jesus for good works,  
chosen as holy and beloved,  
freed to serve your neighbor.

God bless you ☩ that you may be a blessing,  
in the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity.

**Amen.**

## **Dismissal**

Go in peace. Share the good news. **Thanks be to God.**

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS! ANNOUNCEMENTS! ANNOUNCEMENTS!**

### **A Communal Fast from the Sacrament of Holy Communion**

We will be taking a communal fast from the Sacrament of Holy Communion for the Season of Lent. The next time we will take communion as a community of faith will be on Maundy Thursday, when we remember the night in which Jesus first gave this meal.

### **Re-Connect Opportunities will be starting again THIS WEEK!**

We hope you will join us for any, or all, of these Re-Connect Opportunities throughout the week!

Stop in for coffee and conversation at 9 am on Mondays.

TUESDAYS be sure to stop by for Bible Study starting at 11, followed by Lunch and Laughter at noon.

Wednesdays will continue to be our Faith Formation Days.

Thursdays we will have the sanctuary open for prayer for 8 am to 3 pm.

### **Looking ahead to that day when we return to in-person worship**

You will continue to be required to socially distance yourselves and wear masks when you are in the building. We know that there is a sense of hope and optimism for returning to in-person worship with the arrival and distribution of the Covid Vaccine. The increased rate of vaccination, and decreased rate of Covid spread will help get us to that goal of being back together again. However, this is not something that we are going to rush and we are grateful to be in continual dialogue with the other ELCA congregations of Eau Claire, and in consultation with the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Council of Churches.