

God's Impatience Led To..... (Lent 1)
Gen 9:8-17; Ps 25:1-10; I P 3:18-22; Mk 1:9-15

Imagine a time when you were impatient?
Who or what were you impatient with?

Remember how you felt?

Was it a new reason to be impatient, frustrated, irritated, and disappointed? Or was it one of the same old reasons you experienced?

What did you do about it?

Impatience has often produced violence of some kind – at least our thoughts, at times our tongues, and sometimes a violent action. There has been violence since earliest times, and what grief and dismay this has caused for God. This is not who God made us to be. What high hopes God had for us in the beginning.

But by chapter 6 of Genesis we read: “Every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil, and even worse, continually, regularly, repeatedly.” God was regretful, unhappy, grieving, sad and sorry to have called us into being! God may have never expected us to be perfect, but it’s something else to be thoroughly fiendish, to manifest wickedness, immoral and evil in much of what we say and think and do.

So God became impatient. It didn’t take very long for God to get so fed up with his created world that he decided to end it all with the flood. The first Bible story in creation is where God declared his world to be good, very good. God gave the keys of his new earthly kingdom to his human creation and it didn’t take to long, by chapter six it was already a colossal mess.

Human sinfulness had gotten so bad that God decided to start over. God lamented the world that had been created. In anger and regret, God brought down the rain and except for Noah, his family, and the animals he saved on the boat, every last creature was gone.

So we receive one of the best known stories in the Bible. God asked Noah to build an ark. God choose to save a family who stood out among the rest because they had integrity, compassion, and no taste for violence. God blotted out the rest, wiped them from the face of the earth, & started again with a clean slate. Humanity started again from this one family.

The rapists and murderers drowned. God overwhelmed sexual violence itself, the exploitation of the poor & vulnerable, pedophilia, thievery, every wicked act or attitude we think up. All of it was asphyxiated and ended as waters rose, above any ability to float. People’s wickedness sunk into the muck at the bottom & was gone. God started over, kept what was good and destroyed the rest, washed the earth clean of evil.

If we think about it, God baptized the whole lot them... people, animals, every living thing. Except, this baptism isn’t just punishment, the end of God’s patience, and a symbol of death - it’s the real thing. God decided to start over.

If we really understood the implication of this violent story, we might never, ever tell it to our children, and make it sweet and cute, and paint beautiful murals.

But it’s a great story for us to consider as we begin our forty-day Lenten journey. This is a good time – not the only time, but it is a good time – for us to confront our sins and confess our guilt. Lent is a time in which we acknowledge that our sin is serious and our alienation separation estrangement from God is severe. It is the season in which we ask if we have done any thing that would make God want to start over because of us.

This may be the most sobering statement in all of scripture when God’s patience ran out and he stated, “I am sorry that I have made them.” He decided he’d had enough and declared a reboot, a mulligan, a do over. Let the rain fall. “I am sorry that I have made them.”

It's as scary as when Paul wrote in Romans 1, "Therefore God gave them over, God gave them up, in the sinful desires of their hearts."

But the Apostle Peter in the text from First Peter, looked at it differently, didn't he? He wrote, "God waited patiently in the days of Noah... God waited patiently." Patiently for what?, we have to ask. What could Peter have possibly been thinking? The flood took place in the 7th chapter of the Bible. That's a quick progression from creation into evil, isn't it?

We know about human tendencies, that after Noah we have the Tower of Babel, and the discouraging history of Israel's escape from slavery and the history of Peter's time on earth. We know our inclinations today. We aren't any better than the people of Noah's time – maybe even worse. Human beings, God's creations, have not become any better since the flood. So we have to conclude, God's human creation is not going to change. That's the guts of it.

For example, what ever happened to the "war to end all wars?" And why do we have more refugees today than ever before in the history of the world? So do you wonder if God has ever regretted the covenant he made with Noah never to flood the whole earth again? Time after time God's patience has been tested to the limit. The 10 commandments might as well have been ten wishes, the way humanity continues to sin against their Creator and each other. We can't help but wonder how often God has been tempted to go back on his word. He's been tested repeatedly. Maybe that is what Peter meant when he said, "God waited patiently in the days of Noah." Truth be told, God's patience with us has been tested to the limit since the flood.

Our story is told as if, after the flood waters receded, God looked at the destruction and regretted having done what he did. It's as if God repented of his impatience. God set the rainbow in the sky and said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I established."

Maybe this is why this story captivates us and our children. It's not just the boat and the cute animals. It's the rainbow hanging gloriously in the sky. All God's children love a rainbow.

Last December when I was in the middle of my cataracts being removed, on one of the trips to Regina, I was blessed with rainbows. It was a bright clear sunny day. And in a circle around the sun was a well defined colorful rainbow - a sun dog, a solar halo. We could make out most of the seven colors of the rainbow. It felt good to see this kind of rainbow for a while as we drove. I took it as a word of hope for my eyes, as I could see it for quite a while without glasses. Rose and I both thought of her sister, who loved rainbows and had a variety of rainbow designs all around her – including on her key chain. Seeing the rainbow led to wonderment and a theological conversation. I'm sure you have your own rainbow stories.

There are just some words in the Bible that are so strong we can't help but know they come straight from the lips of God. Grace is one of those words. Love, of course, is one of them. Add the word covenant to this short list. It's a strong word, a good word, a word that could only be thought up by God. And the rainbow is a sign of a promise of God's we can trust.

God said, "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." "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." (vs 11 & 16) God set the rainbow in the sky to remind himself of his promise to us. It's a declaration that God is not driven to punish, but desires to restore.

The word covenant appears seven times in our few verses for today. 3 times God promises a bow - a rainbow. 4 times God mentions every living creature. 3 times God says the words, all flesh. And these words are repeated before our scripture in Genesis 9 and afterwards. So Holy

Creator Almighty God is really making a point about his covenant promise.

A covenant is a binding agreement between people. In the rainbow covenant, God initiated, determined the conditions, and confirmed his covenant with humanity. It is unilateral, from God to humans. Usually agreements & contracts are reciprocal. Each party has some responsibility. But with this covenant, people are recipients, not contributors; they are not committed to offer anything to the bond; they are called to accept it as offered, to keep it as demanded, and to receive the results that God, by oath, assures will not be withheld. It's a one way commitment & contract, by God to us. It's a promise by the most powerful character in the universe to the most unfaithful characters in the world – you and me.

The rainbow covenant is an expression of God's determination to restore the harmony that was the original purpose in the creation. God establish a covenant with Noah and us, not based on a demand for better behavior but purely based on God's gracious promise to put aside forever the option of destruction and punishment by flooding the whole earth.

In some primitive societies the symbol for peace was the hanging up of the war-bow, meaning no longer would arrows fly in combat. Well, God, in effect hangs up a bow, a rainbow in the sky in token of his determination to never bring such massive destruction through water, this kind of war, upon the whole world again.

In effect, all of creation, including the animals, all flesh, is given a new beginning, a new chance to live in accordance with God's will and purpose. I suppose we could say this is a restoration of the earlier promise. God uses the remnant preserved by Noah and his family on the Ark, as the seed-corn for a new and abundant harvest. He stuck his neck out to and for unfaithful humanity. Even more – he commits himself again and again in a variety of covenants, until he sends us Jesus, his own Son. Something happened to God. Did he become more patient with us after the flood experience?

Did he come to realize that humans just could not respond as he needs us, wants us to respond to his love? So in his sorrow that we can't stick to faithfulness and goodness, he promised to not destroy the world through a flood.

God can't move to the suburbs or close a door to hide from the violence. He can't turn his attention from earth. Even in Drake as we commit acts of unfaithfulness and disloyalty to our Creator, his eyes are not averted. And God's heart is not numbed. We see only the thinnest slice of human violence and sometimes despair. But God sees it all. God sees it all.

After all, we – you and I and this whole sinful human race of ours – we've not changed. Do you think God hasn't taken note of that? The first thing that happens after this conversation between God and Noah is that Noah gets drunk and all kinds of bad stuff began to happen - again. And it doesn't get any better after that.

God is changed, irrevocably changed, by the experience of obliterating all but a handful of living things. It's important to know that many ancient civilizations and cultures around the world have some kind of massive flood story in their history. Despite what is presented to us as a legitimate decision to destroy for the sake of ending wickedness, stopping the awful path that humanity was on, redirecting us, saving us from ourselves, giving us a second chance – despite God's grief and dismay at what had become of the crown of creation, the objects of God's love – God is profoundly changed. Humanity, however, was not.

So, let us not forget – we need this kind of God. As people of faith, let us point to the rainbow, to the empty cross, remember and proclaim: God has not forgotten us. God has promised that He will not forsake us when the flood waters of sorrow and suffering threaten. Hold on to that promise. And let us never forget what the cross and the rainbow remind us - God has made a covenant with us and that covenant will not fail. God is still patient.

Patience
Rainbow
Covenant

Creatures
Baptism
Temptation
Deliverance from sin

Genesis 9:8-17 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

⁸ 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, ¹⁰ 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.^[a] ¹¹ 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.” ¹² 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: ¹³ I have set my **bow in the** clouds, and it shall be a sign of the **covenant** between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the **bow** is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.” ¹⁷ 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.”

Psalms 25

Prayer for Guidance and for Deliverance

Of David.

¹ To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

² O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.

³ Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.

⁵ Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

⁶ Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.

⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

according to your steadfast love remember me,

for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

⁸ Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹ He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰ All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,

for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

1 Peter 3:18-22 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered^[a] for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you^[b] to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who 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. ²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for^[c] a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who 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 New Revised Standard Version
(NRSV)

The Baptism of Jesus

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

The Temptation of Jesus

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

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news ^[b] of God, ^[c] ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; ^[d] repent, and believe in the good news.” ^[e]
