

February 21, 2021 | [First Sunday in Lent](#)

Gn 9:8-15

Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

1 Pt 3:18-22

Mk 1:12-15

By Bethany J. Welch, Ph.D.

The readings for today invite us to consider the story of Noah, an epic flood that wipes out most of humanity, the covenant God establishes with Noah's descendants, and the patience we might expect from God when we falter in holding up our part of the covenant.

The flood story recounted in Genesis, appearing in some form in other religious and cultural traditions as well, concludes with a promise from the Creator that there will not be a destructive disaster on that scale again. But if the author of the text meant a one-sided commitment, as we might think of when talking about a promise, why use the word covenant, which suggests an agreement between two parties?

Revisiting the Genesis text, we see that God sets out to establish a covenant with multiple parties: all people and all living things. Here, I am reminded of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* where Pope Francis exhorted the Church to care for our common home, by one, recognizing the impact of our destructive behavior with regard to the earth and two, committing to positive action that repairs the harm and plots a new future. Moreover, there is a decidedly integral and ecological frame to *Laudato Si'* that points to the ways in which humans and other parts of creation exist together. Pope Francis states, "We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. *Gen 2:7*); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters (2)."

The agreement then, in this covenant, is that the Creator will not destroy us again but that we must live into the coming redemption through active labor for the good of ourselves, our neighbors, and our common home. We are to be keepers of the air that gives us breath. We must protect the water that brings life.

Seems simple enough. Yet, we know that we are inclined to forget, to walk away, to grow weary, and to sin. We chose convenience over sustainability. We fail to defend the most vulnerable lives. We throw away and use up the very gifts we were called to steward.

And so, we hear in the words of the Psalm an appeal to the Lord to remember compassion that was shown in ages past. We are reminded of faithfulness, rooted in a love that disciplines and holds us accountable. Pope Francis says confidently in *Laudato Si'*, "The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us (13)."

The second reading, from First Peter, lays out the suffering Christ undertook on our behalf. It also alludes to God's patience and provision in holding off the rain while Noah's family constructed the ark that led to their survival by water. I ask myself, am I using the time I have been allotted to fully embrace the saving waters of baptism? Am I living into the resurrection power of Jesus Christ?

Our journey into Lent is a journey into a cycle of baptism, death, redemption, and resurrection. May we consider not only ourselves in that cycle, but all living things! May Lent be a season of looking confidently to the Cross for the sustaining power we need to generously and boldly care for our common home.

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