

Leaning toward....Opening to the promises

Christ Church UM - 22 Feb 2015

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

Genesis 9:8\_17 (CEV)

8 God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 “I am now setting up my covenant with you, with your descendants, 10 and with every living being with you—with the birds, with the large animals, and with all the animals of the earth, leaving the ark with you.[a] 11 I will set up my covenant with you so that never again will all life be cut off by flood waters. There will never again be a flood to destroy the earth.”

12 God said, “This is the symbol of the covenant that I am drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you, on behalf of every future generation. 13 I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creatures. Flood waters will never again destroy all creatures. 16 The bow will be in the clouds, and upon seeing it I will remember the enduring covenant between God and every living being of all the earth’s creatures.” 17 God said to Noah, “This is the symbol of the covenant that I have set up between me and all creatures on earth.”

With our Ash Wednesday Evensong worship, we entered Lent. The origin of the word Lent means springtime, and we certainly are experiencing Spring here. We have family in the northeast and it is anything but.... the Boston area is having the snowiest winter ever recorded. Snow is piled up high to clear roads and passageways and creating huge snow wall.

We have spring blooming everywhere we turn here. Temperatures have been very balmy. We are overwhelmed with evidence of the new possibilities that we often await in spring.

This religious season of Lent is also about new possibilities. We are awaiting and moving toward the retelling of the Easter story. Lent is a 40 day season that symbolically reminds us of Jesus’ 40 days of fasting and prayer in the wilderness, before his ministry began. Faithful people over the centuries have used this time

to cleanse their spirits, and emerge at Easter, having repented of their sins and ready to be reborn.

I remember as a girl, even though I was raised Methodist, there was some talk of giving something up for Lent. I never really understood what that was about, and I'm not sure I ever successfully did this. As I got older, I heard about others who had given up chocolate (No way!!) Or Sweets... or some other temptation... something that typically demanded attention or energy that might pull us away from God. I just read an article by Phil Ressler that listed 40 things we could let go of or surrender during Lent.... things that trip us up and make our lives less than satisfying. Some examples are - impatience, people pleasing, over-commitment, negativity, busyness, worry....others???

Are these some things we can work on letting go of this Lenten season?

As the focus of Lent is prepare us for the mystery and lessons of Easter, it makes much more sense to me to take on some kind of spiritual practice that assists with this. Certainly the ancients and folks today choose fasting and prayer for this purpose....Or might we consider, "what are some of the strengths I need for this journey... this life?" What are the positive traits or gifts that help us along the way? Friendship... Courage.... Creativity... Patience.... Faith... Hope. Can I... Can we commit to identifying some of these strengths that help us to be all that God meant for us to be? Can we let these strengths nourish us and lead us to greater wholeness.... and help us to be made new?

So during this Lenten season, we are going to be looking through the lens of our Lectionary scriptures for some clues about those things that can give us strength for our journey.... our journey to Easter and beyond to a whole and fulfilling life.

This morning we have heard again this Noah scripture... many times, we have heard the tale of the ark and the animals and the flood and the long arduous ocean voyage. One children's song that I loved to sing is "Rise and Shine".... do you remember that?

Everything was hunky dory, dory....And today we heard that God was sorry for what he had done. He promised to never send a big flood like that again....and he said the rainbow would be a reminder of this. This is lovely, but....

Today, we know that bad things happen.. And we have scientific and practical explanations for them. Huge hurricanes can wipe out whole communities.... Tsunamis... major floods, land slides. There is really no way to prevent these.... especially since there are many people in the world and most of us live in places that are at the center of such potential weather and disaster events.

I believe that the ancient ones told this story because they needed to believe in a loving and benevolent God. They didn't have scientific explanations for such events and blamed the Gods or felt that God was angry because of things people had done.... and people needed to be punished. The ancients needed to feel there was a loving God that would love and support them... no matter what!

And, we want to trust this too.... we want to know that when bad things happen there is a loving God who will hold us and carry us through the hard times.

We need the strengths of trust and hope. We are buoyed up during hard times by the assurance that All will be okay. We are grateful for people in our lives, and those we see amongst us who act as God with skin on....who show us in very tangible ways that we matter....that we can make a difference.... and that we can be there for each other.

Bob and Myra, and Ted and Deanie went with a group of folks to Nicaragua this last week. There are going share some photos and stories from their experiences. They bring us tales of hope.

(Bob, Ted, and Myra share)

There are tales of hope near and far -

Tenants and community members work together to create more affordable

housing.

School children work tirelessly to clean up the stream near their school. They also put up signs and pictures to encourage the neighbors to keep it up.

Previous gang member gets a glimmer of hope that leads him back to school. Eventually he works with young gang members to lead them to fuller, productive lives.

Young woman abused as a child vows to be an advocate for other children. She opens a safe house, and works tirelessly to insure safety for children and their single parents.

15 times, Bob Smith has gone to central America, to help rebuild communities ravaged by poverty.

Young woman raised in this church brings technical skills for water purification to African villages.

Hope and trust.... there are big examples.... and small daily moments...encourage us forward and give us strength for the journey.

Today, a rainbow of color in the form of spring that blossoms all around us reminds us that there are many loving people that continue to do God's work, continue to bring hope.

And God is with us.... all the way... assuring us that we are enough....and guiding us onward.



## 40 things to give up for Lent by Phil Ressler

Fear of Failure – You don't succeed without experiencing failure. Just make sure you fail forward.

Your Comfort Zone – It's outside our comfort zones where new discoveries are made.

Feelings of Unworthiness – You are fearfully and wonderfully made by your creator. (see Psalm 139:14 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] )

Impatience – God's timing is the perfect timing.

Retirement – As long as you are still breathing, you are here for a reason. You have a purpose to influence others for Christ. Our work is not always tied to a paycheck.

People Pleasing – I can't please everyone anyways. There is only one I need to strive to please.

Comparison – I have my own unique contribution to make and there is no one else like me.

Blame – I am not going to pass the buck. I will take responsibility for my actions.

Guilt – I am loved by Jesus and he has forgiven my sins. Today is a new day and the past is behind.

Overcommitment – Do less better and accomplish more.

Lack of Counsel – Wise decisions are rarely made in a vacuum.

Impurity – Live lives pure and without blemish.

Entitlement – The world does not owe me anything. God does not owe me anything. I live in humility and grace.

Apathy – Life is too short not to care.

Hatred – Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ).

Negativity – I will put the best construction on everything when it comes to other people. I will also minimize my contact with people who are negative and toxic.

The Spirit of Poverty – Believe that with God there is always more than enough and never a lack.

Going Through the Motions – The more you invest yourself, the more you will get back.

Complaint – Instead of contributing to the problem, be the solution.

The Pursuit of Happiness – God wants something greater and more lasting than happiness. It is called joy.

Bitterness – The only person I am hurting by holding on to this is myself.

Distraction – Life is filled with distractions that will take our eyes off the prize.

Giving up – God never gives up on us.

Mediocrity – If you are going to do something, then give it all you got.

Destructive Speech – Encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching (see Hebrews 10:25 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ).

Busyness – It is a badge of honor to be busy. But that does not always translate to abundance.

Loneliness – With Jesus I am never alone. He is with me wherever I go.

Disunity – If two of you agree on earth about anything, it will be done for them by the Heavenly Father (see Matthew 18:19 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] )

The Quick Fix – Rarely does true transformation happen overnight.

Worry – God is in control and worrying will not help.

Idolizing – Don't assign anyone a standard they cannot live up to.

Resistance to Change – Change is certain. It is not if we will change, but how we will change.

Pride – Blessed are the humble.

Small View of God – Don't tell God how big your problem is, tell your problem how big your God is.

Envy – I am blessed. My value is not found in my possessions, but in my relationship with my Heavenly Father.

Ungratefulness – You have been blessed in a way greater than you realize.

Selfish Ambition – God has a mission for me that is bigger than me.

Self\_Sufficiency – Jesus is my strength. I can do all things through him (see Philippians 4:13 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] )

Sorrow – Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning  
(Psalm 30:5b [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] )

My Life – Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:25 [Open in Logos Bible Software (if available)] ).

## Rise and Shine

Chorus:

Rise and shine and give God your glory, glory!

Rise and shine and give God your glory, glory!

Rise and shine and (clap once) give God your glory, glory!

(Raise hands to shoulder level and sway back and forth.)

Children of the Lord.

The Lord said to Noah, "There's gonna be a floody, floody."

Lord said to Noah, "There's gonna be a floody, floody."

"Get those children (clap once) out of the muddy, muddy!"

Children of the Lord.

So Noah, he built him, he built him an arky, arky.

Noah, he built him, he built him an arky, arky.

Made it out of (clap once) hickory barky, barky.

Children of the Lord.

The animals, they came on, they came on by twosies, twosies.

The animals, they came on, they came on by twosies, twosies.

Elephants and (clap once) kangaroosies, roosies.

Children of the Lord.

It rained, and poured, for forty daysies, daysies.

Rained, and poured, for forty daysies, daysies.

Nearly drove those (clap once) animals crazy, crazy.

Children of the Lord.

The sun came out and dried up the landy, landy.

Sun came out and dried up the landy, landy.

Everything was (clap once) fine and dandy, dandy.

Children of the Lord.

Now that is the end, the end of my story, story.

That is the end, the end of my story, story.

Everything is (clap once) hunky dory, dory.

Children of the Lord.

Chorus