

# **Sermon for Sunday, March 1, 2009**

## **First Sunday in Lent**

**By Tim Ljunggren**

**First Lesson**      **Genesis 9:8-17**  
**Psalm**              **25:1-9**  
**Second Lesson**    **1 Peter 3:18-22**  
**Gospel**              **Mark 1:9-15**

If Ash Wednesday was the day that reminds us of our humility and where we come from (“Remember that you are but dust, and to dust you shall return”), then this First Sunday of Lent reminds us of our joy—or, at the very least, the joy that’s possible in our lives. Today, through our lessons appointed for this particular Sunday, we bear witness to God’s covenant with Noah and through Noah with the living creatures of all flesh, and we’re witnesses of the covenant foretold by the sacrifice of Isaac, the giving of the firstborn for the world’s salvation.

Today, we bear witness to Jesus’ baptism and the beginning of his ministry; we watch as he enters the wilderness alone, a fitting reminder of our own Lenten journeys just begun.

But what are we to make of our own journeys?

The urgency found in today’s gospel lesson communicates to us our strength for the journey ahead. Now is God’s dominion at hand, today—right here, right now, right in this present moment. By tomorrow, Monday, we may have forgotten about this urgency. We have all observed many Lenten seasons, after all, and the journey ahead is not as foreign as when we first began.

Yet here we are again. Today we begin a new journey that will take us to Pentecost, and even there it won’t end. Today we take up life itself, under the signs of God’s hopeful covenants and everlasting love for us and the world. We begin this year’s Lenten journey with the firm conviction that we are not alone when we walk, that we are guided and shepherded by the One who truly knows the way and refuses to leave our side.

We are never alone.

Noah knew this when he began to build his ark; the strength and the presence of the Lord was with him always, and he found the strength and the courage to do what was asked of him. The watery depths of God's displeasure were measured by the very real presence of God's wish to restore things to a more divine state.

Traditionally, the season of Lent has become a time for many of us to "give something up"—yet, the true meaning of this season doesn't lie in giving something up, but in giving ourselves up to God.

This can be the ultimate sacrifice for us.

Lent is our acknowledgement that all humankind is meant to be God's image and likeness in the world, to make accessible God's concern for all living creatures and to enjoy unity under God.

We are called to embrace our relationship with God while, at the same time, to acknowledge that we are sometimes lacking in the ways to truly relate to God. Lent can be for us a time to look at that lack with a measure of love and astonishment—the void we all feel sometimes can only be filled by the One who created us from dust.

Love and astonishment—these are the true concepts of Lent that we need to explore. We are not in this to perform some mindless ritual of self-denial, but to give ourselves up and over to God. We seek a deeper understanding of ourselves and our own motives, and we seek a deeper relationship with the God who formed us out of the dust, and quenched our thirst with Baptismal waters, who played wholeheartedly with the clay of humankind, infusing it with Holy Breath and modeling it after pure affection.

This, then, is our only Lenten duty—to know how much we are loved by the One who formed us, and to know that there is nothing in our earthy souls that can prepare us fully for this season.

We simply have to journey into the wilderness one more time.

Come—"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Amen. ...

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