

Let us pray... Eternal God, gather your Spirit in this place. Open our hearts and minds so we may find you in all that we do. Guide our journey together, with you at the center. Amen.

Our Gospel reading starts off with some famous words...

"In those days..."

And this phrase, in those days, can be used to reminisce fond memories, or to state simple facts like remember those days when gas was way cheaper, when grocery prices were lower, or fill in the blank...

But the phrase, in those days, can also signify something difficult... A time of trial, a time of being brokenhearted, a time of simply getting through, by hanging onto whatever you can.

And our Gospel today, is about those days... Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit, where he endures 40 days of being tempted, exposed to the elements, and encounters real evil in the world.

As Biblical scholar Brian Blount explains, this passage is about "Clouds tearing. Heavens ripping. Divine voice booming. Spirit descending. This is terrible, untamed tiger talk. It is the language of slashing and slicing, shredding and clawing until something once locked up on that safe and seldom seen heavenly side over there knifes its way free to this historical, human side we're standing on over here."<sup>1</sup>

And it's not just our Gospel reading today that is apocalyptic... Our Old Testament reading is also drenched with this kind of imagery.

The story of Noah and the flood, long tamed by children's stories, cute prints of baby animals, and colorful rainbows, starts with tragic death and destruction on cataclysmic levels.

A world that we can relate too on some levels...

---

<sup>1</sup> Working Preacher. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-mark-19-15-6> Accessed 2/15/2024

With two recent shootings in the past week, one at a church, another at a parade...

With wars raging over seas, the horrific landslides in California, the first ever tornado in Wisconsin during the month of February, plus the lack of winter weather we had been experiencing.

Then there is the fact that we are in another election year... A time when divisions become cavernous... Where fingers are pointed and hatred broods.

It may seem like the world is ending, but that is what people have been experiencing for thousands and thousands of years.

Which is why Scripture is filled with apocalyptic stories, even more than what we heard from our two readings today...

There are many battles of good versus evil throughout Scripture, and throughout the history of humanity... And have become so popular in fact, that Hollywood continues to cash in on this theme. From *Star Wars*, to *Harry Potter*, to *Lord of the Rings*, and many more.

They are sought after because they are jam packed with hope... That good will overcome evil... And that "those days" will pass...

And while those days will pass, those days also impact you...

And so, society has come up with a solution for that too... Painting the romanticized picture that enduring hard things will make you stronger or better, so you best pull up your boot straps and trudge on...

And while we do need to continue on, this message misses the point... Because we do not experience the breaking, and heartbreak alone...

You do not bear the weight of hard things single handily, God is right there with you.

As we heard in our Old Testament reading... God was with Noah during the flood and God delivered Noah, his family, and all the animals to safety... God provided a way forward.

And we see this again with Jesus in the wilderness...

God provided a way forward, by sending Christ God's love—in the form of wild beasts, angels, and the Holy Spirit... Which allowed Jesus to endure those 40 days.

As Jan Richardson states, "Let us agree for now that we will not say the breaking makes us stronger, or that it is better to have this pain than to have done without love.

Let us promise we will not tell ourselves time will heal the wound, when every day our waking opens it anew.

Perhaps for now, it can be enough to simply marvel at the mystery of how a heart so broken can go on beating, as if it were made for precisely this.

As if it knows the only cure for love is more of it, as if it sees the heart's sole remedy for breaking, is to love still.

As if it trusts that its own persistent pulse is the rhythm of a blessing we cannot begin to fathom, but will save us nonetheless.<sup>2</sup>"

God knows what heartbreak feels like, because God's heart broke, after the flood... A heartbreak so shattering, it changed God... God hangs God's bow in the sky, and promises that never again will such devastation take place.

God took a dire situation and gave us a promise and hope, by completely transforming what water now signifies... No longer will water be used as a destructive force from God, instead water is now a place for us to be united with God in baptism.

---

<sup>2</sup> Jan Richardson. *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*. Copyright 2016, 2020 By Jan Richardson Wanton Gospeller Press Orlando, Florida. Blessing for the Brokenhearted pages 33-34.

And the flood wasn't the only time God's heart broke... God's heart also broke, when Jesus died...

It didn't matter that he would be raised from the dead, God's heartbreak was real and those 3 days must have felt like an eternity, even to an eternal God...

And yet, what happened in "those days" changed everything...

And we are once again journeying to those 3 days, as we journey through Lent.

A journey that is long, but where we are sustained by God's love and the good news that is to come, birthed in Christ's resurrection.

And this good news is a part of your DNA... Woven into your very existence since your birthing cry, and when you joined with Christ in your baptismal waters, claimed as God's beloved...

And today we will welcome a new member in baptism.

Where she will experience in her little body God's good promises for her.

Where she will be born into a living hope and an everlasting love... Love that will be with her all of her days...

And God's love dwells within each of you... In your birthing cry, and as you grow old. Guiding you through the night, God sees your life unfold...

And not only does God see your life unfold, but God is right there with you... In your wilderness, in your heartbreak, and all around us in the apocalyptic battles of good against evil.

God is in those days and God is in what is yet to come.

This Lent, may you believe in God's good news. May you be filled with living hope, and may you marvel at the mystery of God who somehow always finds a way forward... And sustains us along the way... Amen.