

**Mark 1:9-15; Genesis 9.8-17; 1 Peter 3.18-22. 1st Sunday of Lent: 20th February 2021
10:30a.m. Zoom from St. Andrew's Vicarage**

God has been watching over us for ages. From the earliest times God has sought to help us know how to live well. The story of Noah and the Ark is a good example of how God has tried to help us do better. St Peter talks about this in his letter, about how the flood of those early times was a kind of initial baptism. Jesus came along in later years, with his cousin, St John the Baptist, to talk about how we can still be baptised today for the forgiveness of our sins and mistakes.

Today is the 1st Sunday of Lent, a day that, in our Bible readings, we commemorate how, when Jesus was over 30 years old, he would also be baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan. It was time for Jesus to do the work the Father had sent him to do. To do this, Jesus had to be sure he made the right decisions so, he went into the wilderness to a very lonely place so he could spend time with his Father, God. He would give his love to the Father and know the Father loved him enormously in return. He was in that place for 40 days and nights, deciding what to do and how to do it.

Last Wednesday was a special day for Christians everywhere. do you know its name? That's right, Ash Wednesday is the day that Lent begins. And there are 40 days in Lent, just as Jesus had 40 days in the wilderness (if you work it out Ash Wednesday to Easter is six weeks and four days. Does that make it 40 days? No, it doesn't quite, it actually makes 46. The Sundays are never counted, because they are always celebration days when we can usually share holy communion. Without the Sundays it is indeed 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday.

We are given these 40 days to think about how we can best serve God and do what he wants us to do. what sort of things can we, have we, promised to do. You could think about how you can show your love for God by working on your relationship with him. You could show your love for others a bit better than you might have been doing already, because it's not easy to love your neighbour, especially if they're a bit difficult. Or you could just concentrate on trying to do what God wants us to do, which involves thinking really hard about what God thinks about all sorts of things.

You know, some people say they like doing what comes naturally. Here's a story about a man who did just that, he let his own garden grow completely naturally, which basically meant he didn't do any gardening at all. When somebody asked him why his garden was in such a mess he said, "I was leaving it to God." God won't do for us what he's given us the ability to do. If you want a good garden, or a good life for that matter, you have to work at it.

With any garden, if you just want flowers, it's no use filling your beds with vegetables - you only get out what you put in. You'll get more than you bargained for anyway, because you'll also get weeds. If you leave your life to run itself in the same way, you also will collect weeds. These won't be of the garden variety but full of things that equally, you don't want. Both gardens and lives need regular, tender, loving care. Lent is the time for looking at what you have and how to make improvements.

In that wilderness, this chap Satan sent all kinds of temptations to try to win Jesus' heart. The word for Satan also means 'diabolos', which means "that which throws apart" or, 'that which is divisive'. Quite often, it's that first moment we don't make up our minds or commit our hearts that we're defeated. For Jesus, the time for decision and commitment had come. In the wilderness, Jesus would have asked of himself, "Who am I? What am I called to do? How will I do it?"

St Mark also tells us that Jesus was with wild beasts: leopards, lions, bears, jackals, or snakes. All of these are signs of danger but perhaps Mark was thinking of Isaiah the prophet who said that, in the times of the Messiah, all will live in harmony & peace. St Mark also mentions angels. Whenever we are tempted, troubled or distressed, we're not alone, divine help is at hand if we just turn and ask: our God is always with us in our hearts.

Genesis 9.8-17

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. 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.’

1 Peter 3.18-end

18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you 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 people, 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 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 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; with you I am well pleased.’

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness for 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 of God, 15 and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’