

PASTOR GREG – SERMON
18.02.24

1st Sunday in Lent. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. For forty days our Lord Jesus Christ suffered temptation in the desert. For some of us that forty days has become 40, 60, 80 even 100 years of temptation and testing. And during all that time we have also experienced grace and mercy. Let us pray.

In Genesis 1 we hear: *God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.* But then we hear and God's good creation being corrupted by the sin of Adam and Eve. And their rebellion against God resulted in their children inheriting a selfish and rebellious heart. But God still graced Adam and Eve and even Cain who killed his brother Abel- God graced them with succeeding generations of children. But sadly and tragically they all followed after the ways of their parents and so in Genesis 6 we hear: *The LORD saw how great man's wickedness/misery/affliction/vexed on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that He had made man on earth, and His heart was filled with pain.* Too many parents know the sorrow of children gone astray. Most of us can only imagine what the parents of murderers and mass killers have in their heart! How much more for the One Good Being in the universe- God.

How long did God wait? How long did God wait for His creation- His people to change from their wicked ways? We are not told but we do hear that God finally decided to bring justice upon His creation. Remember always that one aspect of judgement is TO RIGHT WRONGS. And of course punishment is also part and parcel of judgement. And then there is the desire of God to end to suffering that the descendants of Adam and Eve were doing to each other and so: *The LORD said, "I will wipe making, whom I have created from the face of the earth- (and all the creatures)- for I am grieved that I have made them.* And so came the FLOOD.

It is such a well-known story- a story children love to hear and so many little arks and animals dwell in our homes and Sunday Schools. But it is a terrible story of sin, rebellion, evil and God's holy wrath and death.

But of course, not all died. Noah and his family were saved- saved by the ark of God. Finally, the rains stopped, finally the waters receded, finally life could begin again. But sadly, tragically the hearts of Noah and his family remained corrupted/selfish/sinful. We have a sad little snippet of this reality in 9:18: *The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth...Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine he became drunk and lay naked in his tent. Ham...saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside.*

But before that story we have the account of the rainbow- a sign of the covenant- a sign of the promise: *Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.* The rainbow is not to remind God of His promise but to remind us. To remind us of sin, of the consequences of sin, of death, of God's holy wrath and of God's holy love and life *EVEN THOUGH every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.* Even after the flood.

This reality is confessed in Article 2 of the Augsburg Confession: It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men (and women) who are born according to the course of nature are born and conceived in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mother's wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God.

And these words are taught by Jesus Christ: Mark 7:20: *For out of men's hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man (unfit for God).* . John 8: *I tell you the truth; everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*

And that is why BAPTISM is so important. Because we need to be born again (John 3), we need to be re-created (2 Cor 5), we needed to be saved and this is what happens when we receive the word of God in faith- when we are baptised: 1 Peter 3: *For Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God...In the ark only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water now symbolises baptism that now saves you...It saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is seated at God's right hand.*

The season of Lent reminds us of the cost of discipleship- it calls us to repent and believe in Jesus Christ for our eternity. The season of Lent reminds us of temptation and testing. And the season of Lent prepares us for the first great festival of the Church- EASTER.

I finish with a quote from Luther's Small Catechism: Who then receives this sacrament of Holy Communion worthily? Answer: Fasting and bodily preparation are a good external discipline, but he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: "For you" and "for the forgiveness of sins"

Forgiven through, and only through Jesus Christ. Amen.