

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Genesis 9:8-17

NRSV

In the first creation story (1:27-28), “God created humankind in his image ... and ... said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, ... and have dominion over the fish ... birds ... and ... every living thing ...’”, but all are to be vegetarian. Deviation from God’s ways increased over time until “the earth was filled with violence ... all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.” (6:11-12). So God decided to eliminate humans by means of the Flood, but (in his mercy), he saved a remnant. The waters have receded; Noah, his family and the remaining animals have set foot on dry land. In 9:1-3, God renews the promise of Genesis 1; he again commands, “Be fruitful and multiply”. He now permits humans to eat meat: they now have complete dominion over all creatures, but they must have a greater respect for human life: because humanity is made in the image of God, wilful bloodshed must be accounted for to God (vv. 4-6).

God makes a “covenant” (v. 9) with Noah, his sons and “every living creature” (v. 10). Because it is from his sons that “the whole earth” (v. 19) shall be “peopled”, the agreement is between God and all humanity. He will never again destroy humankind (vv. 11, 15, 16). Being with all creatures and with “the earth” (v. 13) itself, this contract speaks of ecology, and it is an “everlasting covenant” (v. 16). Ancient people imagined a rainbow as a divine warrior’s weapon, his “bow” (v. 13); his arrows were lightning. God gives the “bow” as a visible “sign of the covenant”. That God’s “bow” is “in the clouds” (and not on earth) shows that God is no longer angry with humans. (The repetitions in vv. 13-17 may show that various versions of the story were merged.) When rains come, they will end – with a rainbow; there will be hope. The story of the Flood teaches that God judges the world according to human behaviour, punishes evil, and rescues the worthy.

Psalm 25:1-10

NRSV

The psalmist prays that God will show him his *way* (vv. 4, 8, 9), his “paths” (vv. 4, 10). He trusts in God (v. 2), and hopes that therefore God will deliver him from personal enemies. May none who trust in God be shamed or be subject to treachery. Those who follow God’s ways will be saved (v. 6). The psalmist trusts that God will forgive his sins through his “mercy ... and ... love”; may God remember his present fidelity rather than his youthful deviances (v. 7). God “instructs sinners” (v. 8), “leads the humble ... and teaches the humble” (v. 9, i.e. those who hold him in proper respect) in how to be godly.

1 Peter 3:18-22

NRSV

In vv. 15-16, the author has written: “Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you ... Keep

your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.” We are called to do more than *defend* ourselves: we are to respond to any request for explanation of our “hope”, engage the outsider in conversation, with the goal of converting him or her. This may entail suffering, for which Christ is the example.

Christ suffered for the sins of us all (v. 18); he is “the righteous”. (In Acts 7:52 he is called the “Righteous One”.) He brings us to God. He really died (“in the flesh”), but he overcame death; he rose to new life. Now vv. 19-20: in Genesis 6:1-4, angelic beings had intercourse with women, thus breaking the boundary between heaven and earth. In late Judaism, people believed that the action of these beings provoked the Flood. In 1 Enoch, a popular book when 1 Peter was written, Enoch, on God’s behalf, goes to tell these beings that they are confined to prison. In v. 19, the story of Enoch is applied to the risen Christ: the “spirits in prison” are these bad angels. During the building of the ark, “God waited patiently” (v. 20) for humankind to turn to him, but none did. The “eight” are Noah, his wife, their three sons, and their wives. Then v. 21: baptism also involves water, but differently. Its role is not ritual cleansing (“removal of dirt”); baptism saves us, putting us in a condition to be found worthy by God at the Last Day (“appeal”), sharing as we do in Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ has gone to heaven, and is in God’s place of honour (on his “right hand”, v. 22), and has angelic beings (“angels, authorities, and powers”) subject to him. God saved people in the past; now he saves us through baptism.

Mark 1:9-15

NRSV

John the Baptist has come, “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (v. 4). Many have taken the opportunity to start new lives in God. Jesus, too, is baptised by John – Mark does not tell us why. The opening of the heavens symbolizes the start of a new mode of communication between God and humankind. Perhaps “like a dove” (v. 10) is an allusion to the *spirit hovering* in Genesis 1:2. To Mark, the “voice ... from heaven” (v. 11) confirms the already existing relationship between God and Jesus. Matthew and Luke describe Jesus’ temptation in some detail, but Mark mentions it only briefly: all three say that Jesus overcame tempting, enticement, by the devil. “Satan” (v. 13) is the supreme demon whose kingdom is now ending. “Forty” recalls Israel’s 40 years in the “wilderness”; it echoes the 40 days of testing Moses endured when the covenant was renewed after the *gold calf* incident (Exodus 34:28). Elijah too spent “forty days” on Mount Sinai (1 Kings 19:8). In the “wilderness” (probably the Judean desert, the home of demons), “wild beasts” may attack him, but “angels” protect him. The word Mark uses here for *arrest* (v. 14) also occurs in the story of Jesus’ passion and death: John’s fate foreshadows Jesus’ fate. Jesus returns to Galilee. His message begins with “the time is fulfilled”: the time appointed by God, the decisive time for God’s action, has arrived. “The kingdom of God has come near”: the final era of history is imminent. Jesus calls people to start a new life in God’s way, to “repent, and believe in the good news.”