

21st February 2021 First Sunday in Lent

Readings

Genesis 9:28 - 17

Psalm 25: 1 - 10

1 Peter 3: 18 - 22

Mark 1: 9 - 15

Lenten Signs



After pancakes and ashes – no connection to each other! – we are plunged into the season of Lent – six weeks of preparing ourselves to celebrate Easter. Of course the reality of Easter is with the Christian constantly. We have fifty-two weeks in every year to get closer to our Living Lord, Jesus.

Today's scripture readings give us signs to guide us on our Lenten journey. First, there is the rainbow from the account of Noah and the great flood. The story is one of our first childhood memories adorned with cuddly toys of the animals Noah gathered at God's command. It is truly a colourful picture-book story but in our earliest years perhaps we fail to appreciate the great truths about creation which are hidden there. Not least a simple contemporary understanding of how we humans, living contrary to God's clearly defined rules for loving and respecting his world, may bring about the destruction of so much rich and beautiful provision and at the same time put our own lives at risk. The most important truth is the rainbow! It's the sign of God's promise of his eternal love, forgiving and restoring. A sign that working together with him we may ensure the destruction of earth's riches need not happen again.

Some of the most magnificent rainbows I have seen have been against a background of the darkest skies. God's promise that when we create the darkest night of our experience - when life falls apart around us - He is still God – Lover, Saviour, Faithful Friend. When the flood recedes and dry land re-emerges, God renews his covenant promise - *All will be well with you if you maintain your relationship with Me.* That, of course is the underlying theme and purpose of Lent. We use the weeks of preparation for our Easter celebration to remind ourselves of God's gracious love for us - *'He will always be for us as we continue to be For him!'*

It is a pity that we get involved with Lent as a time for 'giving up' rather than 'getting up' closer to our Lord. The first makes Lent an arduous exercise with the bargain, *Lord, if I'm good enough I will get what you've promised!* NO! Promises are built on trust. It is God saying, 'I promise! and I'm trusting you to TRUST me to keep the promise.'



Peter gives as another sign for Lent – Baptism.

It's the sign of God's gracious salvation and acceptance of us – a sign of our belonging to him and his Church. Most of us remember little about our own baptism until we accept what was promised to us by the sign. Belonging is a wondrous privilege. In the story of Jesus' baptism we learn how it is not a vaccine against temptation and the devil, but a sign to look to, remembering that in our hardest 'desert' times *we belong to God*.

One more sign of promise – and the best of all. Throughout our Lenten journey we keep our eyes on it, waiting for us at the end of the road - an empty resurrection Cross - Jesus' promise that he is alive with us as we live, trusting in him. Lent is a time to remember the signs of promise and trust which lead to an ever-deepening relationship of life in Christ among his people. I pray it will be.

A Prayer

Lord, when my life steers off course;
When I rebel against the life you ask of me;
When I doubt your words;
When I run behind you, shouting '*Not this way, Lord!*'

Teach me to trust you;
To live and travel your way;
To hold on to memories of your past kindness,
forgiveness and gracious care;
To follow, humbly
accepting that you know the way better than I do.

Keep before me your signs of promise -
The rainbow: My baptism: Your resurrection Cross;
Give me that closeness to you
which never lets go of your promises.



You say, Trust Me!

I say, I will, my Lord!