

February 18, 2018 Sermon Notes

All readings http://lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Lent/BLent1_RCL.html

Focus: Covenants and Jesus' reset button in the desert.

For the next five weeks, we won't have a sermon series per se; however, the covenants presented in the cycle of Lenten readings offer us a way to frame the next forty days. We might be tempted to turn Lent into a New Year's resolution 2.0, because, you know, those resolutions died a few weeks ago. Instead, pray to experience Lent as a story of covenants. Jesus did not go into the desert, so that we could crave chocolate for 40 days. He went there to make good on a promise of love.

Shorthand to understand the next five weeks of Old Testament covenant stories

- Feb 18 'Lent 1' Genesis 9:8-17 -- God hits the reset button with Noah – The rainbow protection covenant.
- Feb 25 'Lent 2' Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 -- Abraham and Sarah get a new family addition for the sake of nations – The world's covenant.
- Mar 4 'Lent 3' Exodus 20:1-17 -- 10 Commandments – The people's covenant (didn't work out great).
- Mar 11 'Lent 4' Numbers 21:4-9 -- The Bronze serpent – The healing covenant.
- Mar 18 'Lent 5' Jeremiah 31:31-34 – Despite our poor track record, the prophet sees a way forward – A new covenant.

The desert

Let me be clear, I don't think Mark saw the desert temptation as matchy matchy to the flood. But zoom out to covenants in general. Mark's gospel clearly sees Jesus as the bearer of a new covenant promise. That promise would push him into the desert so that he could reassert that God was in charge. Jesus knew better than the Beatles that all you need is love. Nothing would shake this - neither hunger, intimidation, nor bribery. This 'small' story of temptation embodies the approach that God takes throughout the biblical story to make good on promises. God and Jesus make no compromise with anything less than total love and devotion.

After baptism (kind of like a purging flood), Jesus is literally tossed by the Spirit into the desert. Jesus already knew the promise that God was protecting him at Baptism "This is my son the Beloved". So when the Spirit throws him into the desert, the only way Jesus could get through was by holding to the unshakable love of God. 1st he is hungry. Satan says that if you are the Son of God, have God fix your hunger. 2nd The devil takes him to the holy city and says throw yourself down. God cares too much about Jesus to let him get hurt in a fall. 3rd The devil takes him up a high mountain for Jesus to worship the devil.

Noah's covenant and other covenants in Lent

Covenants are familiar – like communion-every-Sunday familiar. When the priest says, "This is my blood of the New Covenant," we are remembering the last supper promise for eternal love even while Jesus faced his execution. This promise began when he sparred with Satan in the desert, and Jesus "won" because he knew, in his bones, that love is non-negotiable.

One of God's covenant re-setters was Noah, but Noah and his descendants botched the job. God would have to reboot with Abraham and Sarah (Lent 2). God hits reset again with the Moses and the 10 commandments (Lent 3). God would try healing the people who were cursing their hunger, trials, and even God. God asked for a bronze snake on a pole to heal snake bites (Lent 4). *Next time you go to a hospital, go on a visual scavenger hunt to find for snakes on a pole.*

Going forward into the story of covenants, God uses the prophets. God would speak through Jeremiah (Lent 5). Jeremiah even called God's ancient promises, "the new covenant", probably because most of us are suckers for the new car smell. Most of the Bible, if not all of it, can be understood as – 1) covenants made by God 2) agreed to by the people 3) broken by the people 4) God tries again 5) God tries again and again. And moving to Jesus, Gospel shows that Jesus is the fullness of this never-give-up-on-love approach.

To Jesus in the desert is a snapshot of it all

Jesus is the fullness of the covenants. He is the new Noah, the new Sarah and Abraham, the new Moses, the new healing, and the new covenant. The desert shows how he began to embody them all. Whatever you do these next five weeks, even giving up chocolate, may it help you see clearly how God never, ever, ever gives up. Jesus is the fullness of loving promises - past, present and yet to come.

Pastor Todd