

## **Lent 1 B 2021**

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

February 21, 2021

Mark 1:9-15; Genesis 9:8-17; 1 Peter 3:18-22

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Churchy people like to use fancy words to describe the various parts of the church building. The room where we keep bread and wine and candles and robes and paraments is called the *sacristy*. The place for sacred things. Fancy words. The place of entry is called the *narthex*. We could call it the reception, where visitors and worshipers are received and welcomed. Which is hopefully what this congregation does in more normal times. The narthex is traditionally the place that is farthest from the altar. It's the place for penitents. The people who have been bad Christians and aren't allowed to come all the way to communion. A place of punishment and separation, rather than a place of welcoming and receiving. The narthex. Churchy people like fancy words. And then there's the chancel. The fenced off area that you're not allowed to go to. Chancel, related to the word "cancel." Fancy words. Sacristy. Narthex. Chancel. It reminds me of the pop song from 1990. By MC Hammer. "U Can't Touch This." Does anybody remember MC Hammer? Sacristy, narthex, chancel. You can't touch this. No trespassing. Keep off the grass. Hands off.

But there is one churchy word that I'd like to keep. The *nave*. The nave! The boat. That's what "nave" means. The boat. It's the big place in the church where the people are. Often it has pews, but there was a time when there were no pews. But it was still the nave. The great church buildings of the Middle Ages had arches that held up their roofs. The arches looked like the ribs of a boat. Structurally, a church is an upside down boat. The nave.

*God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.* How many people were in Noah's ark? Eight. Noah, his wife, their three sons, and the three women who were the wife of the three sons. [Genesis 7:13] You really should re-read the story. As a grownup. Genesis six, seven, eight, and nine. It's not as simple as you think. And there's a lot of waiting. Someone needs to count up all the waiting that Noah did. After they got into the ark, a week passed before the rain began to fall. Can you imagine? A lot of waiting for what God is going to do next. (An adult reading of the Noah story.) But our second reading today makes it sound like God was doing the waiting. Waiting for Noah to hurry up and finish building that ark. *God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.*

Our second reading connects the water in the Noah story to the water of baptism. *God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight*

*persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you.* So, partly as a development out of today's second reading, we end up with the church as a boat. The people of God are gathered together into the boat. The nave. It's the big boat for all of the people God is saving. It's a good name for the church. Because a boat is safety. It's a life preserver. That was the point of Noah's ark. Safety and preservation of life. And churches should be places of security. They should be places of sabbath. They should be places where life is protected. Life in all of its diversity. And churches like Dove of Peace tend to be good at that. We tend to be stable. Tradition, continuity, reverence, classic. Calm in the midst of the storm. Warmth out of the wind. Kindness protected from an uncaring cosmos.

But a boat, a nave, is more than stability. It is a means of transport. A boat is on a journey. So when we speak of the nave, we're talking about all of us gathered here and on a journey. God's journey. So it's not just a place of stability. It's stability in motion. It's a nave on the water going places. Where are we going? In the Middle Ages, they would have said heaven. We are pilgrims on our way to the heavenly Jerusalem.

But the Bible suggests renewal and revival. There are eight people in the boat. For the writer of Genesis that might have been a coincidence. But for First Peter, eight is the number of renewal. Seven days in a week; the eighth day is the beginning of a new week. Ancient Christian baptismal fonts had eight sides. Laid on its side, the number eight is the mathematical symbol for infinity. Noah and his wife, and their three sons and three daughter-in-laws, and all of those pairs of creatures, ready to be fruitful and multiply and renew life on the planet. So the journey of the boat, the destination for the nave, is God's plan for renewal of life. God's plan to preserve life for the sake of life.

According to Genesis, this was when God created the rainbow. There were no rainbows until this moment when Noah left the ark. The rainbow is a reminder to God to protect created life. You might think that God doesn't need reminders. But this is the God of Genesis, not a philosopher's god. There's the story of the woman who is staring at her hand, staring at her wedding band, and rotating it around her finger, and talking to herself. And somebody asks her why she is fixated on her ring. And she responds that if she looked at her husband right now, she would divorce him. Or worse. She can't look at her husband and his behavior. She chooses to say focused on her commitment. That ring is the reminder of her promise and her faithfulness even when her husband may not deserve it. The rainbow is God's reminder of his promise and his faithfulness even when humankind may not deserve it.

The nave has special significance for us right now because we do not gather as a community in the nave right now. In fact, if our church is the ark, then there are about eight people or so who are in the nave on Sundays. Someday this year, we will all be together as one people of God, in the big boat, the nave, of our church, sailing on God's journey to revive and renew life as he created it to be. In the meantime, the rainbow is one of God's signs that he never gives up on us. What a great sign for the season of Lent. What a great sign for a season of pandemic. God never gives up on us. Amen.