

Week one
Transforming
Promise

Transforming Life

a Lent Course for 2012

produced by the Diocese of St Albans

www.stalbans.anglican.org

www.livinggodslove.org

The Bible Reading

Lent 1

Genesis 9.8-15

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.'

¹²God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.'

You may prefer to save paper by only reproducing pages 2 & 3 and using bibles to read the passage.

Genesis 9.8-15

a Lent Course for 2012

produced by the Diocese of St Albans

Some Reflections

Most of us do not use the word 'covenant' very often, although occasionally someone finds they have a covenant on their house. However, 'covenant' is a really important word in the bible. In fact, 'covenant' was such a dominant theme that the first generation of Christians used the word to describe the very bible itself. We are familiar with the phrases 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament', but an equally good translation is the 'Old Covenant' and the 'New Covenant'.

Jesus used the word 'covenant' at the Last Supper: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26. 28; Mark 14. 24; Luke 22.20). Jesus was pointing forward to his own death and resurrection, which was to usher in the New Covenant. But why did Jesus choose to use the word 'covenant'? Those who were in the Upper Room at the Last Supper would have known the word 'covenant' and the ways it was used in the Old Testament. The three best known covenants are those made with Noah (Genesis 9), Abraham (Genesis 15) and Moses (Exodus 24).

The background to our passage this week is the account of Noah in Genesis 9, found three chapters earlier:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favour in the sight of the Lord (Genesis 6. 5-8).

1.2

God called Moses to build an ark and along with his wife, children and a large number of animals they are saved from drowning. In response we are told that: *Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it* (Genesis 8.20).

The essential concept in the covenants both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is that God, in his sovereign power and by his gracious love, takes the initiative. He calls us to himself by establishing an agreement with humankind, by which he binds himself to his people. Just as God committed himself to Noah and in return asks Noah to offer ourselves to Him, so too we are invited to respond to God's covenant.

However there are also some differences between the covenants found in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In all three of the great covenants in the Old Testament 'men (and women) offered their own imperfect righteousness and their faulty allegiance in exchange for the promises and mercies of God'. Whereas in the New Covenant men and women 'without claim or merit are freely forgiven by God in Christ, who at the cost of supreme sacrifice reconciles (us) to God' (James Atkinson).

Covenant is a powerful statement of the overflowing grace and the outpoured love of God. It reminds us that all that we are - and all that we are called to be - arises out of God's initiative and God's grace. Note that God's covenant was not just with Noah but with all living creatures (Genesis 12. 9 and 15).

Transforming Life

Questions for Discussion

What is the significance of the sacrifice that Noah made on the altar? (See Romans 12. 1)

If it is true that we 'without claim or merit are freely forgiven by God in Christ', does it really matter how we live our lives (you might like to look at Romans 6. 1-11)?

In what sense does God's covenant extend to 'all living creatures' and what does this tell us about our attitude to the creation?

Ideas for Action

Each person to jot down

- ◆ One thing that has struck me
- ◆ What one thing am I going to do?
- ◆ What one thing will I pray about this week?



Prayer

Spend some time initially in corporate silent prayer. Pray for the Holy Spirit to enable us to live lives pleasing to God.

You may like, then, to give thanks to God for his love and grace; pray for those who deliberately flout God's laws and damage the lives of others; ask God that we might respond to his grace with grateful and thankful hearts.

Week one Transforming Promise

Close

Finish by saying the covenant prayer of John Wesley, and then the Living God's Love prayer together:

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

Living God, draw us deeper into your love;
Jesus our Lord, send us to care and serve;
Holy Spirit, make us heralds of good news.
Stir us, strengthen us, teach and inspire us
to live your love
with generosity and joy,
imagination and courage;
for the sake of your world
and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

