

## The Covenant

A writer, musing on his wife's gardening hobby, which she insisted on continuing despite being barely able to work in the garden because of her advancing years, described her:

*"the small, hunched figure, absorbed in the belief that there would be yet another spring, oblivious to the ending of her own days which she knew perfectly well was near at hand, continued to work through the winter months, calmly plotting the resurrection".*

"Calmly plotting the resurrection" is a fitting description of what we will be doing during these weeks of Lent. The seed we plant now will grow and blossom, come Easter Day. But in these cold and often wet days of February it can be difficult to believe the promise. We may have spiritual troubles and feel weighed down, and these are the very things Lent is intended to touch and change. Despite this, we may find it hard to move on.

But move on we must, and God's promise will sustain us. We may now only dimly see Easter, and we may hear its music only very faintly. But we do see a little, and we do hear a bit — just enough hopefully, to give us courage. In this Lent, forgiveness is larger than sin; even our dullness will not be held against us. God will truly do a new thing in our lives - *renewal*.

Lent calls us to "redecorate" the spiritual space in which we live. Too long we have gone without enough love and mercy; those things waste away if we do not exercise them. Lent is the time of that spiritual exercise; the time when we stop blaming other people and other things for our evil, and own up to our part in it, confident of forgiveness.

The poet, William Blake described death as *moving into another room*. That is a good description of Lent. We leave behind the furniture of cynicism, the dusty rugs, worn spots, dreary colours and sloppiness. We move into the new room, where the light promises a new dawn, gradually strengthening in the full glory of the Sun of Justice.

Today the story of Noah makes a rare appearance into the Liturgy of the Word (and we write it off as a *story for children* to our detriment!) The authors of Genesis 1-11, in their desire to explain our relationship with God, tell us a story of God as Rescuer. God saves Noah, his family, and his animals from the flood and establishes a covenant with them. The story of Noah connects with our own lives as we will recognise a few moments after hearing it, when we take up our response to the reading in the singing of the Psalm:

*Your ways Lord, are faithfulness and love for*

*those who keep your covenant.* Noah's journey is a type of all movement to God's life, leaving old ways

behind, confident of God's promised future.

Alas, many times in Israel's history God's people were unfaithful to the covenant and the journey, but God's faithfulness and generosity always prevailed, giving them opportunity after opportunity, until ultimately he sends his Son, who himself is *The Covenant*, to save and rescue once and for all.

The creator God sent Noah a rainbow as a sign of his love for us. The covenant with Noah's family, present and future, symbolised by the rainbow, reveals a God at odds with the usual religious ideas of the culture. In the Gospel today we see Jesus embraces the wilderness and enters exile. He embodies the movement of breaking with the past, of facing the collapse of the old social orderings, but points beyond this collapse of our old certainties. He confidently appears on the public scene, proclaiming the newness and nearness of the Kingdom (Reign) of God.

By his death and resurrection, and just as the wheat grain falls on the ground in order to give life, Jesus wins our eternal life for us. It is to this life we have been pledged, through baptism, which is not just the washing away of physical dirt, but our being freed from sin's clutches. We don't generally celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism from now until the Easter Vigil; instead, throughout this season we ponder the *meaning* of our Baptism, we go into the dryness of Lent's desert, the desert of prayer, fasting and giving. At first glance, the discipline of Lent may feel rather lengthy and gloomy. But for those who take it to heart, it is a joyful season of repentance, the stripping away of that which hinders and a preparation for the great feast of the Passover in Holy Week.

