

From the February 4, 2009, Issue

Lent Year B

First Sunday of Lent – March 1

Gen. 9:8-1 - Psalm 25:1-10 - 1 Peter 3:18-22 - Mark 1:9-15

Noah and his family (Gen 9.8-1) “were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God” (1 Pet 3.20-22). In baptism we act out in our bodies the truth we confess - that our life is fully immersed in the name/presence/authority of the Father, Son, and Spirit. To acknowledge our immersion in the Triune Life is to have our darkness judged, crucified, and buried. With him we are “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1 Pet 3.18). In doing this we are “appealing to God for a good conscience.” We are asking God to renew our minds in the likeness of the Risen Lord’s mind, that we may share in his utter freedom from shame. We hear with Him what our Father says about us: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1.11). The man Jesus is whole, unbroken; to share in his life is to be saved from brokenness. And the Spirit’s favorite place to make people whole? The desert, with Satan and the wild beasts (1.13). Thus begins our season of Lent.

Second Sunday in Lent – March 8

Gen 22.1-14 - Psalm 16.5-11 – Rom. 4:13-25 - Mark 8.31-38

God wasn’t jerking Abraham around when He told him to sacrifice his son. God was just making sure Abraham knew what he was getting into. By joining God’s mission in the world, Abraham was signing his descendents up for a life of suffering and death. Abraham’s family—and we Gentiles who have joined his family through faith—join Yahweh in bearing the pain of the fallen world. And Abraham’s ultimate son, the Son of Man, “must undergo great suffering...be rejected...and be killed” (Mk 8.31). Humanity is infected with cancerous evil. Jesus is the scalpel that carves it out, and he is the agonized flesh that bears the surgery. His followers share in his task and his pain, taking up our crosses and losing our lives with him (8.35). But in prayer we know: “You do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit” (Ps 16.10). We know that “by [Abraham’s] offspring all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves” (Gen 22.18). We share in Christ, blessing the world by losing our lives, and in doing so we are saved/made whole (Mk 8.35). In the midst of pain and loss, we say by faith: “The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot...I have a goodly heritage” (Ps 16.5-6). Our good heritage is Abraham’s heritage—that we will “inherit the world...through the righteousness of [Christ’s] faithfulness” (Rom 4.13).

Third Sunday in Lent – March 15

Exod. 20:1-17 - Psalm 19 - 1 Cor. 1:18-25 – John 2:13-22

Fools hope to find love/joy/peace in gods that cannot provide. But not so with us. We hope in the One True God, and our hope shall not be in vain (Ex 20.2-7). In Him we shall find true rest (20.8-11), and our families shall find harmony (Talk about miracles)! We shall be free of relational dysfunctions like murder, adultery, theft, lies and jealousy (20.12-17). We will truly share in God's wisdom, knowing and relating to all things in accordance with what they really are. As we join Jesus in knowing and living truthfully, we learn to live effectively and joyfully in the world. His wisdom "is perfect, reviving the soul... making wise the simple...rejoicing the heart...enlightening the eyes...more to be desired than gold" (Ps 19.7-10). But wisdom puts us at odds with the entrenched foolery of our world. Jesus speaks the secret of the cosmos: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," and the geniuses within earshot think he's talking nonsense (Jn 2.19-20). That is how far gone human wisdom is. "Even God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom" (1 Cor 1.25). We are not interested in 'expanding our minds.' We are interested in nothing less than the crucifixion of our mind, so that something entirely new may be raised from its grave.

Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 22

Num. 21:4-9 - Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 - Ephesians 2:1-10 - John 3:14-21

Lent is a time for ruthless honesty, so here goes: My name is John, and I have loved darkness (Jn 3.19). Jesus led me by the hand, but I "became impatient on the way." He prepared a table before me, but I "detest this miserable food" (Num 21.4-5). I desired only poison, and by eating it I became sick. I was dying of starvation, yet I "loathed any kind of food" (Ps 107;17-8). I followed "the desires of flesh and senses" and I experienced the wrath/consequences of my self-destructive behavior (Eph 2.3). I was meant for better things than this—good things. I was "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life" (Eph 2.10). By design, humanity runs on a specific kind of fuel: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me" (Jn 4.34). But by my refusal to believe the truth, I was condemned to a life of choking down lesser things (Jn 3.18). I was dead (Eph 2.1). Still, the truth remains true: "When we were dead through our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (2.5-6). Today, as the Spirit relentlessly whispers this truth in my ear, I am learning to believe it. As I believe the truth of the One who is forever with me, I feast on real food for the first time, and I taste eternal life (Jn 3.16).

Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 29

Jer. 31:31-34 - Psalm 51:1-12 - Hebrews 5:5-10 - John 12:20-33

Israel hears the promise of the LORD: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31.33-34). She cries out: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit

within me” (Ps 51.10). And the LORD forged in Israel’s flesh a clean heart, His own heart in the man Jesus, in whom dwelt the right Spirit. In him—Son of Abraham, Son of Man—all Israel and all humanity would be made glorious. But glory doesn’t look like we thought it would. The path of glory runs straight through the grave (Jn 12.23). When this hour of glory comes, we say with Jesus: “My soul is troubled,” but we know it is for precisely this hour that we have been sent (Jn 12.27). We need a Savior who can meet us here in our agony. To become exactly the Savior we need, the Holy Son entered into our agony himself. His suffering perfected him for his role as the one who brings wholeness/salvation to us in the place of our deepest pain (Heb 5.8-9). His suffering/death judges the world, defeats evil, and draws the world forever into his embrace (Jn 12.31-32). As we share in his suffering, we find true glory.

~ John Stonecypher