

Water and Sky

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Alright, well, it is the first Sunday in Lent. And we almost always use the lectionary during Lent that we've been using all year now, so your lectionary muscles have already been flexed for several months. But I would encourage you in addition to any other reading that you might be doing in the Bible to use the lectionary in the week leading up to Sunday to find some scripture passages that you can read or study or reflect on or use in prayer. So many people have told me when we've used the lectionary that that is a great preparation for worship on Sundays, and if you don't know how to find the lectionary you can just Google the word lectionary and it's the first result. Also on the website for the series that we're running you can click through and find the scripture passages that way. Or tap through if you're on mobile. I want to begin today by reading the gospel reading for the first Sunday in Lent in this year from Mark 1:9-15. If you're reading in the red Bibles you'd go to page eight twelve to find this or you can just listen as I read this story:

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan and just as he was coming up out of the water he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased. And the spirit immediately drove him into the wilderness he was in the wilderness forty days tempted by Satan and he was with the wild beasts and the angels waited on him. After John was arrested Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news.’”

So one of the things that I suggest that you do when you're trying to study the Bible, if you want to learn more about the Bible, if you want to be shaped by God in your reading of the Bible, one of the really very interesting things you can try to do, and one of the best study techniques I have learned is to read a text, say, for example, this one and then look for connections between that text and other parts of the Bible. We've occasionally done this together on Sundays. We

do it often in studio, which is our large group spiritual mission gathering that happens on the second Sunday of each month right here in this room at five p.m. And this particular way of studying the Bible is a little bit tricky if you're very new to the Bible, for obvious reasons. If you've only read a little bit of the Bible it's kind of hard to make connections to other parts of it. But if you do it in community with each other you can kind of begin to catch on a little bit and, of course, the more you read the Bible the more connections you'll be able to make. And I will also say this to those of you who may be thinking, I barely have ever opened the Bible. I'm no good, time for me to check out. You are the ones who will make the best connections, I promise. I promise you will be. Not every child can really engage in this as well as some can, but some kids have come up with the best connections ever. I remember Ethan Proctor [laughs] one studio just gave this connection that all the adults in the room were like, Whoa [laughs]. So don't sell yourself too short, and begin the process of studying the Bible and looking at these connections.

I thought it might be fun to spend a little bit of time this morning looking at connections between this passage from Mark's gospel and other parts of the Bible. Now, you can do this how it's open — blank slate. But I want to specifically suggest that we look at the links between this story of Jesus' baptism and the account from Genesis that Joe and Claire read during the children's moment this morning about the Ark and the rainbow. Even if you don't know the Bible at all you probably have heard the story of Noah's Ark, even if you've only ever considered it kind of derisively you'd least know enough about it to joke about it, right? So if you want to flip back to Genesis nine eight through seventeen you can take a minute to do that (that's easy to find it's only six pages into the Bible). Genesis is the first book of the Bible; you just count up to nine. You don't have to get to double digits and you'll find this passage. And it may be that you know the story well enough that you know some of the other details of this story because it wasn't the whole account of the of the flood that we heard this morning. So I thought we might just work on this together a little bit.

You have now permission to shout out connections that you see between the story that I just read from Mark one, the baptism of Jesus, and the story that was read earlier of the flood account and the rainbow. So who sees a connection?

[Male voice in congregation] The Dove.

[Pastor Scott] The Dove. Was the Dove in the Genesis account we read this morning?

[Voices in congregation] No.

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[Pastor Scott]. It wasn't, but there is a dove in the account of the flood, isn't there? Tell us about the dove quickly, would you, Tim?

[Male voice] Noah sent the dove out to see if there was land (rest not audible).

[Pastor Scott] Yeah, Noah sent the dove out to see if the waters had receded enough that there was land that they could hit. And the dove brings, a stick you called it, back. But what was it, an olive branch? Yeah. Interesting. That's a great connection and the dove of course descends on Jesus after the baptism. I wonder what the connection between those two things might be. One of the reasons I think this is super interesting to do with New Testament passages is that the early Christians who were at these accounts, who read these accounts, were at first all devout Jewish believers so they would have known all of the stories of Torah of the Hebrew Bible and they would have seen this interesting kind of fulfillment. Fulfillment is not just, like, there's this prophecy about a donkey and Jesus rides the donkey so that's that's a fulfillment. There is that but there's also stuff like this, where when the dove descends on Jesus they couldn't help but think about the death of from the flood account. Good, good connection, thank you. Other ones?

[Male voice in congregation] Covenant.

[Pastor Scott] Covenant. Okay, where do you see a covenant? We heard the word covenant a number of times in the Old Testament reading. Tell me where you see it in the story of the baptism of Jesus.

[Male voice] The voice of God saying, This is my son in whom I'm well pleased was like an establishment of a covenant.

[Pastor Scott] Yeah, yeah. Sure, so the voice of God saying, This is my son in whom I'm well pleased. That's like an establishment of a covenant just like God said he was establishing a covenant with Noah and his family and all of the earth, "all flesh," as it said in the NRSV repeatedly. Other interesting connections? Yes, James?

[Male voice in congregation] Wilderness (not audible).

[Pastor Scott] Oh yeah, okay, cool. You twisted and turned it there, I like that. So the forty days, Jesus is driven out into the wilderness for forty days and that's that's evocative of, what did you say?

[Male voice] (not audible)

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[Pastor Scott] That's exactly the kind of thing that's fun to do. So you connected with the water of the flood story with the birth of Moses and the forty years in the wilderness, right? Forty years, forty days. Let's go with water, yeah, there's water in both. Good [laughs] I love it.

[Male voice] (not audible)

[Pastor Scott] (Whistles) Yeah, the heavens torn apart by the Spirit in the baptism and the heavens opened up with rain for the flood. Of course, that was just the hard firmament that's part of creation opening up so that the waters above could fall down to the waters below. No, I'm just kidding (laughs). Yeah, I'm evoking the creation story. I like that; the tearing open of the sky, that's an interesting image. I wonder where else we'd find that in Scripture. So sometimes you draw a line between two things and you have a line. If you draw a line with a third thing, now you have a shape, or maybe you have a trajectory. Very interesting, okay.

[Female voice] (not audible)

[Pastor Scott] Right, yeah, the water is a huge one in scripture. We can go all over the Bible and find water stories and so, as you say, sometimes it's the thing that protects life and kind of thing that takes away life. And the idea of Moses being put in a basket as a little baby and floated down the Nile, there's very much his own ark if, you will. Doug?

[Male voice] (not audible)

[Pastor Scott] Hmm, coming out of water somehow puts you right in the center of the story of what God's doing. Interesting observation. We could go all over the water with that too.

[Male voice] (not audible)

[Pastor Scott] Interesting connection; Jesus being submerged or immersed in water and then the whole creation being submerged in water. That's an even more specific water connection there. Yeah, cool. So here's the thing: with each one of these, we could we could spend like three, four, five, ten, twenty minutes just drilling down on that and saying okay, what does that connection mean to me? What is what is God saying to me in the observation of that connection and where else do we see it so we can make a shape rather than a line, that kind of thing. I think we could do that with that type of thing as well. Corey?

[Male voice] (not audible)

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[Pastor Scott] The re-emergence, yeah. Jesus coming up out of the water. And Noah and his family coming out and being saved from the waters of the flood.

[Male voice] (not audible)

[Pastor Scott] Or the opposite, times when the waters part away from you as when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. Jesse?

[Male voice] (not audible)

[Pastor Scott] Yeah, the emotional trial that comes after the after the flood waters recede and then after this amazing moment with the Father that Jesus has and then out into the wilderness to have this kind of challenging or depressive kind of experience. And boy, that could teach us a lot about what happens to us sometimes when we've had a very intense spiritual experience with God. Sometimes I think it sort of recalibrates our soul in a way that's not I was not always helpful because we expect the normal to be when the needle's up here and then when we go back to what might be more typical or normal it feels terrible, and sometimes it does send us even further into the depths.

Well, would you believe that we are like out of time already, probably past out of time. For me this is incredibly interesting and if it's not for you I apologize, and it's over [laughter]. But I do hope that it inspires you to think more and think more deeply about the scriptures, not just as something that you can kind of download into your brain database but it's something that you can immerse yourself in and submerge yourself in which will change you and teach you and draw you closer to God and to each other. I do want to read one more passage of scripture today. This is the epistle reading that the lectionary assigns to us, and it's 1 Peter 3:18-22. If you want to flip ahead you can go ahead and do that (ninety five) but I'll just read it here for you:

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, 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, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.”

Now listen, this is a dense, dense passage of Scripture that I'm going to just drop and walk away from [laughter]. But there's a lot there. Peter makes some of those connections that we've

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made and maybe in ways that we didn't necessarily expect. And what's that business about, "made a proclamation to the spirits in prison"? Go look up on Wikipedia "The Harrowing of Hell." It's a very interesting Christian doctrine that comes from this text and sort of sneaks its way into the Apostles Creed when we say, "He descended to the dead," or some versions of it say, "He descended into hell." What does that mean exactly? We can't go down that road but it's another thing that you could maybe be inspired to go and look more closely at. But all of this beauty, all these water things, all the stuff happening in the sky. Doves and rainbows and arks and baptisms. The voice of God, the promises of God, the covenant that God makes with us and with creation. It's all kind of like this beautiful tapestry and sometimes it feels good, and it's right just to just to kind of sit in front of it like you would sit in front of a work of art in a museum. And you don't have to figure everything out, you don't have to know what every little part of it means. Sometimes it's enough to sit and be in awe of what God has done and said. So pray and give thanks to God for these scriptures.

Lord thank you for meeting us in your word and we pray that as we return to it again and again this week, this month, this year, and throughout our lives that we would meet your holy spirit there. That you would be stimulating our hearts and our minds toward deeper understanding toward greater love and toward your grace which changes the world and saves us. We give you thanks in the name of Jesus, amen.

I want to invite you to come as we sing another song together to receive Holy Communion. At Artisan we practice Communion every week and we practice an open table, which means that you don't have to be a member of our church to take communion because this table is not our table, it's the Table of the Lord. Your kids if they're down in the classrooms can take communion with you. If you prefer that they don't please get them right after you take communion because I think their time is probably coming to an end as well. And I'll remind you that there's a member of the prayer team who would be happy to pray with you right now also. So I invite you to come and respond to the spirit, however the spirit may be speaking to you this morning. Let's continue to worship God in song, in sacrament, and in prayer. Thanks be to God, amen.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com