

Mark 1:9-15^{v vi}

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 out 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. Now 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."

^v About the Gospel: Mark 1:9-15

Today's reading recounts Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. The event of empowerment by the Spirit at Jesus' baptism (vv. 9-11) immediately leads into a time of testing. The 40 days recall the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2), the 40 days of Moses on the mountain (Exodus 24:18; 34:28) and the 40 days of Elijah's journey (1 Kings 19:8). Exposure to temptation is a continuing theme of Jesus' ministry, in the desire of the crowds for a sign (8:11), in Peter's rebuke (8:32-33) and in the jeers of the crowds at his crucifixion (15:29-32).

Apparently Jesus was prompted by the end of John the Baptist's active ministry to begin his public work. Jesus now proclaims that "the time is fulfilled." The work of the prophets, including John the Baptist, was to prepare for God's kingly rule.

In Jesus, however, all God's prophetic words find their fulfillment. The prophets were called to speak God's message, while Jesus is God's message. "The kingdom of God has come near" (v. 15), that is, the kingdom of God is more than merely nearby, it is present in Jesus.

^{vi} Reflection and Response

Today's readings invite us to reclaim the ancient symbol of the rainbow in scripture. We can delight in the fact that Lent begins not with some dismal sign of sackcloth and ashes, but with a radiant beam of hope.

To begin, let's imagine ourselves in Noah's damp shoes. A telling detail precedes the passage read today: in Genesis 7:16, God locked him into the ark. That odoriferous, claustrophobic menagerie of grumpy people and noisy animals is a dramatic version of what we face daily. Our families, our churches, our jobs may not be

ideal. But they are for us the theater of God's creation, the arena of God's activity.

Deep down, many of us don't want to be saved. The work of redemption requires too much pain and hassle. Yet God places us with the very people who will be instruments of our salvation. Those in our households and workplaces challenge us to love in a concrete way that no fantasy can ever draw forth. With wise planning, God foresaw our struggles—and locked the doors of our personal arks.

Lest that sound too grim, God also planned some brightness. We all know the delight of waking to a clear morning after several days of rain. If we magnify that feeling of relief, we can appreciate the joy Noah and Company felt when they finally saw the sun.

The analogy to contemporary times is clear. We too navigate choppy waters, confronting the chaos of war, the tragedy of child abuse, the danger of escalating violence and the sad consequences of our own failures. Yet some stubborn streak persists in hoping. When clouds cover the earth, we look for the rainbow.

Jesus encourages our hope by pointing out that this is the time of fulfillment. Today is our unique opportunity. Jesus assures us that good news can be found even in our puzzling modern situations.

Quietly consider:

What brightness in my life represents what the rainbow did to Noah?