

So it's Lent. Let's talk about sin. What are we to do with sin? Well, what has been done? Genesis gives us some sin stories. Adam and Eve sinned, so God threw them out of the Garden of Eden. The world sinned, so God destroyed it, except for Noah. In both cases, in the context of the stories, the sin was universal, as was the response. So what happened? Sin continued. Adam and Eve were the only two people on the earth, at least according to a strict reading of Genesis. They were punished, but sin continued. Also according to Genesis, every person on earth was sinful, so God decided to unmake creation. Saved just enough DNA so he didn't have to start from scratch – wonder why? It only took six days the first time. Nevermind.

Still, even after destroying every living breathing critter on earth, except the ones on the ark, sin was wiped out, right? Of course, the first thing Noah did after getting off the boat was to build an altar. That wasn't so bad. The second thing he did was to plant a vineyard, make some wine, get drunk on the wine, and pass out naked in his tent where apparently his son Ham molested him. So much for getting rid of sin.

The fact of the matter is, there is no getting rid of sin. But that is a feature, not a flaw. Because sin is the following of our own will instead of God's will. And we are particularly designed by God to be able to do that. God gave us free will. We are free to choose to follow God or not. Again, by design. What good is coercive love? If we had no choice but to love God, would that be love? I don't see how. To use an admittedly sexist, but I hope understandable example, a young girl going through an awkward stage may feel that she is not physically attractive. If her mother tries to reassure her that she is indeed pretty, it means very little to the girl. What else would a good mother say? But if some boy in her class tells her she is pretty, that's a whole 'nother thing.

So it is with us and God. Our love and worship of God have more meaning because we do not have to give them. We are free to respond to God's call. Without a choice, it has no meaning. Because we can choose, we often choose badly. We follow our own desires instead of seeking God's will. Fortunately for us, God's love is so great that God stands ready to forgive us before we even realize we are in need of forgiveness. Of course, that in no way means we should feel free to live it up, secure in the knowledge that we will be forgiven. God is no patsy. The awareness of our sinfulness should be grievous unto us. If our sin doesn't bother us, we are way off the track.

Now, we need to tread carefully here, because this is admittedly teetering on the edge of a heresy called Pelagianism. Although we are free to choose the good, we would not be able to without God's grace and God's call to us in the first place. Salvation is not by our merits, but by God's grace. How we live into that salvation is the Christian life. Doing good works is not the means of salvation, but the response to salvation. We don't love our children any less when they misbehave, and we don't love them any more when they mind us. But it does make them easier to be around. Fortunately, our heavenly Parent is better than any of us at remembering just how much the children are loved.

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Still, there is sin. We still sin. No matter that we are baptized, or come to church, or take communion, or tithe, or anything else. We will still sin. Wiping out every living thing and starting fresh didn't end sin. Despite our many failings, God still makes it possible to triumph over sin. Not by our own efforts, but by God's grace. For when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, God in his mercy sent Jesus Christ to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to God. (BCP 362) Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring us to God. For our sakes, he came down from heaven and was made man.

The way that God deals with sin is not by eliminating sin or sinners, but by taking an active role in allowing his creatures to overcome sin by redeeming us through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Incarnation was not a response to a plan gone wrong, but an integral part of God's plan to draw all creation into himself. The Flood wasn't an attempt by God to start fresh, only to have it not work. If anything, it is a lesson to us that God's way is not destruction but salvation. If we are to follow the good example of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is not by flushing out the sinners and getting rid of them; it is by seeking them out and sharing the good news of God in Christ with them.

The season of Lent is about preparing ourselves for the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ this Easter, but it is also about finding ways to arm ourselves, to nourish ourselves, so that we go out and do the work that God has given us to do. To minister to the world in the name of Christ, and to be faithful witnesses to the God in whom we live and move and have our being. To say that Lent is about denial, or even sin, is to lose sight of the bigger picture – our calling to be Christ to the world. That is why we observe Lent; that is why we come to church; that is why we even exist. May God give us the grace to live into that calling. In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*