

(Read Genesis 9:8-17, 1 Peter :18-22, Mark 1:9-15)

While the southern states of Australia have been sweltering and burning, the north of Australia has been under water. An area the size of our entire state has been under water in Queensland. Townsville has had 1600 mm of rain since new year, 500 more than their yearly average, and rain is forecast there for the whole of March. So much for 40 days and 40 nights! Hard to believe it could rain so much, while we have all but forgotten what rain is! In our own far north Lake Eyre is beginning to fill and will soon be teeming with fish and bird and plant life. It is strange how water that covers and destroys somewhere brings new and abundant life somewhere else.

Today's Bible readings are all about water – a flood that destroys and yet saves, and two baptisms, one for Jesus and one for us, water that destroys and yet saves at the same time too.

The flood at the beginning of the Bible is usually seen by adults as a children's zoo and a boat to play with under a pretty rainbow, but nothing much there for our faith. But the story of Noah and the flood and the destruction of the world is twice as long as the account of the creation of the world, which says God sees this story as significant for us. We can't just leave it to the kids to play with.

The Bible is such a thick book and it starts with the creation by God of a perfect world but by chapter 3 there is temptation and disobedience, blaming and excuses, and the world is no longer perfect because the first humans are no longer what they were supposed to be. By chapter 4 one man is dead, killed by his own brother and by chapter 6 the whole world was so violent that God wishes he had not made us. Have you ever wondered whether God regretted making you? I have on my worst day, when I can only guess how much I have disappointed my creator and when I have hated myself and what I have become.

Just like we sometimes feel like destroying something we have made that doesn't turn out the way we had hoped, God regretted making the world, and he was so disappointed he vowed to destroy what he had made by undoing what he had done. The water that separated at creation creating order and blessing is unleashed and destroys every living thing – except one man, his family and a menagerie of animals. God holds out a candle of hope. Even as he can't stand sin and evil in the world and destroys life he saves a life. He saves one man who wasn't perfect but who remained faithful to him in spite of all the opposition, and who acted on God's word when everyone laughed at him. Noah is saved by the same waters that destroy sin and wickedness in the world.

After the floodwaters subside, Noah and family are there standing on terra firma on top of a mountain. Then God does something extraordinary. He makes a promise. A promise to the whole earth, to the animals and every living thing, and to us, his humans. He promises never to do that again! In fact he promises to bless the world of nature and multiply people and the animals. He repeats the promise of creation.

"This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." (Genesis 9:12-16)

God hung his bow in the sky, his weapon! God hangs it up never to use it again, and to remind himself of his own promise. In its colours we are meant to see God's blessing and smile, and the end of his anger at what we have done with in and with his world.

Now you would think we would learn from such an awesome display of divine power but the mud was hardly dry when history repeated. The rest of Genesis and the next 38 books of the Bible's library tell the same old story of temptation, disobedience and sin, blaming and excuses, violence and one disaster after another. Human nature is unchanged after the flood. But God had changed his own response to sin and violence and evil in the world. God kept his word and has never again destroyed everything and everyone. Instead God decided to suffer in and with his fallen world rather than destroy it again.

In Jesus Christ God does that in person, on foot, in the flesh. He comes to suffer the violence and evil that ruin his world. When Jesus begins his ministry as we read today in Mark 1:9-15 the first thing he does is to get dunked in the muddy old Jordan river. It was his baptism. Not that he needed any kind of cleansing but we do, and so Jesus prepares for our own baptism by entering ours. And the first thing that happens to him is temptation. Non stop 40 days and 40 nights of temptation. How did he survive it? He trusted his Father, he remembered the spirit like a dove descended and hovered not just over the waters like at creation but over him. And he would have remembered his Father's words at his baptism – **“you are my Son whom I love, with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11)**

Jesus, not a rainbow is now the sign of God's love for us, his cross stands in the sky on Good Friday as a permanent reminder that any anger and disappointment God may have about you and I has been dealt with, in Jesus, in himself! The cross is not pretty like a rainbow but eternally effective. God commits himself to what Jesus has done for us. All he asks is that we trust it is enough to save us.

St Peter puts these two readings today about water together, when he writes about our own baptism: **“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God..... God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.”** 1 Peter 3:18-21

In the flood everyone died except one man and his family, on the cross one man dies to save the whole human family. And in and through the waters of baptism he saves you and gives you a clear conscience before God. The same waters that killed wickedness saved Noah, and in the waters of baptism your old Adam and Eve, your old sinful self died and was drowned, and a new life, the life of Christ is raised up to live for God.

Just as the story of Noah is not just for children but a real reminder of the power of God's anger at sin yet the power of his love for an ordinary man and his family, so baptism is not just for children either, it is more than a sign, a token, it is the power of God to save you.

God stands by his promises. We may not get to see rainbows too often these days, but we can see the cross every day as the permanent reminder that God is no longer angry at us but loves us and wants life for us and with us forever. Every time you turn on a tap or see a flood on TV remember and see it as a sign of his promise to you and to himself, the promise you heard and received in your baptism, the flood that saves you.