

The Weeks of Lent: God's Covenants

The First Week of Lent: February 26

Readings

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalm 25

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15

The First Reading from the book of Genesis on the first Sunday of Lent proclaims God's second attempt at a good creation. Not wishing to completely destroy all "bodily creatures" ever again, God set a rainbow in the sky as reminder that, when clouds ever threaten rain, the bow will remind God of the promise. This is nicely and poetically recorded in these opening chapters of the Torah, but the promise is very clear: our God renews the promise to be eternally faithful to God's People, and we are given a sign and pledge of this renewed covenant. As the story continues to unfold, however, we know that we did not so much break with God again; we simply forgot about the covenant altogether.

LENTEN BANNER: **rainbow** for the sign God placed in heaven



The Second Week of Lent: March 4

Readings:

Genesis 22:1-19

Psalm 116

Romans 8:31-39

Mark 9:2-10

On the second Sunday of Lent, we hear about Abraham whom God put to the test. Why? Because already in Genesis 15:6, the text proclaims that “Abram (not yet Abraham) put his *faith* in the Lord.” Before Ishmael (Chapter 16), before God’s promise that Abram -- now Abraham -- would become the father of a host of nations throughout the ages, “to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (Chapter 17), even before Isaac (Chapter 21), Abraham *trusted* God. Now, at the same time that God ended the practice of human sacrifice as a sign of the covenant (God had already made circumcision that sign), the text extols a father who would not withhold from God his own beloved son. In return, God promised “I will make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky.” Faith and trust, leading us to *obedience*, is the invitation God offers as our part of the covenant.

LENTEN BANNER: **stars** for God’s promise of how numerous Abraham’s descendants would be



The Third Sunday of Lent: March 11

Readings:

Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

John 2:13-25

Moses and the Law is the focus of the First Reading on the third Sunday of Lent. The psalm proclaims the reasons for our obedience: “The law of the Lord is perfect ... trustworthy ... right ... clear ... pure ... true ... just, and more precious than gold.” Israel accepted the yoke of the Torah given by God as a protection against the corruption of evil so Israel might become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Jacob Neusner writes on the *Theology of Rabbinic Judaism*:

For Adam and Eve the fall brooked no looking back; sin marked the end of Eden. Ten generations later, God gave up hope, finding only Noah righteous in his generation. Ten generations after that, God identified Abraham, of all mankind, as faithful and obedient: him he did call, with him made a covenant, and to his heirs...God made himself known by fully spelling out his will at Sinai in the Torah (or Teaching). For the new moral entity called Israel, sin is not indelible because Torah provides a two-fold antidote: (1) the Torah’s commandments educate the heart of man, so that by nature he will want to do what God wants... (2) For failures and sins, defined as rebellion against God, the Torah makes available the means of washing sins away: sacrifices that atone for inadvertent sin, confession and the Day of Atonement, reconciliation with the wronged party, and associated acts of repentance... These constitute public transactions involving God and Israel and therefore represent only communal- not familial, let alone personal- categories. The Torah through its law therefore accomplishes the task of forming a new moral entity, Israel, within the very framework of providing or the atonement of sins.

LENTEN BANNER: **yoke** for the Torah allegiance promised God by Israel



The Fourth Sunday of Lent: March 18

Readings:

2 Chronicles 36:11-23

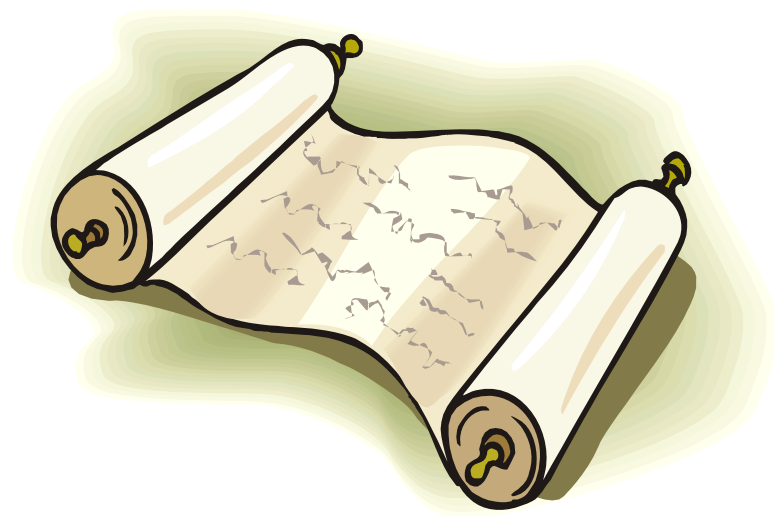
Psalm 137

Ephesians 1:4-10

John 3:1-21

The second book of Chronicles on the fourth Sunday of Lent proclaims what happened to the people of Judah as a result of their infidelity to the Torah and to the covenant: exile in Babylon until the Persian king Cyrus allowed them to return. While the people suffered the consequences of their own misguided plans, they collated, studied, and eventually wrote down the texts of the Torah. In this process, God's faithful mercy endured, eventually working through the king of another people. God was continuing in his fidelity to the covenant

LENTEN BANNER: scroll for the written Torah the Jews brought back to Jerusalem



The Fifth Sunday of Lent: March 25

Readings:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51

Hebrews 5:1-10

John 12:20-36a

The fifth Sunday of Lent proclaims to God's people in Babylon the promise delivered by the prophet Jeremiah during their exile: God invites them to a new covenant, a new law written upon their hearts, the sure knowledge that this new covenant is between the people and a forgiving God who calls them to reconciliation. The gospel proclaims the new sign of the covenant: the Son of Man will die upon a cross.

LENTEN BANNER: **human heart** for where God's new covenant law will be written



Palm Sunday: April 1

Readings:

Isaiah 50:4-7

Psalm 22

Philippians 2:5-11

Mark 14:1-15:46

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord proclaims that sign of the new covenant. Jesus' passion and death is prophesied in Isaiah's third song of the Suffering Servant of God, sung in Paul's letter to the Philippians, and proclaimed in Mark's gospel that "Christ became obedient for us even to death, dying on the cross." Faith, trust, and obedience even to death.

LENTEN BANNER: palms for the traditional symbol of Palm Sunday

