**Genesis 9: 8-17 (Mary Cresswell);  I Peter 3: 18-22 (Mary);  Mark 1: 9-15**

**Sermon:  “The Time Has Come”**

This sermon title is taken from Jesus’ instruction to His hearers in the beginning of Mark’s gospel:  “The Kingdom of God is at hand (The Time is Here!). Repent, (turn away from sin) turn toward God and begin the to live a new (redeemed) life!”  What a marvelous call we have from Jesus.

More and more I am convinced of the truth, beauty and awesome goodness of the gospel.  “Lord have mercy” what a profound time this is in our lives and in the history

of the church.

And I am struck how appropriate are Jesus’ words in our context as I conclude my time as your pastor and we each move on to a new phase in our lives.  “The time has come,” I am retiring as you pastor on April 30, 2024.  And the time is ripe for all of us to look to God for guidance and trust that our lives will carry on with goodness, love, joy, peace—and all the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-23).  God never abandons us as we continue to seek Christ’s presence and guidance for every step of our lives.

Lord have mercy upon us.

**Genesis 9: 8-17**

**The Message**

**8-11** Then God spoke to Noah and his sons: “I’m setting up my covenant with you including your children who will come after you, along with everything alive around you—birds, farm animals, wild animals—that came out of the ship with you. I’m setting up my covenant with you that never again will everything living be destroyed by floodwaters; no, never again will a flood destroy the Earth.”

**12-16** God continued, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and everything living around you and everyone living after you. I’m putting my rainbow in the clouds, a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth. From now on, when I form a cloud over the Earth and the rainbow appears in the cloud, I’ll remember my covenant between me and you and everything living, that never again will floodwaters destroy all life. When the rainbow appears in the cloud, I’ll see it and remember the eternal covenant between God and everything living, every last living creature on Earth.”

**17** And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I’ve set up between me and everything living on the Earth.”

**Commentary:**  At the end of the great flood, God makes a covenant with Noah, his family, and all of creation!  Never again, is the promise, never again will all things be destroyed by flood!  Now this is quite a promise given global warming, rising sea water levels and the prospect of many islands soon to be under water.

We have a major challenge to humanity for survival upon earth given the speed and magnitude of the changes happening every day.  Still we trust and believe God keeps this promise as we seek to trust and obey God’s word.

Such faith is re-enforced every time we see a rainbow in the sky.   🌈  This is the sign of God’s love and peace to all creatures and all creation.  Amen.

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**I Peter 3: 18-22**

**The Message**

**13-18** If with heart and soul you’re doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you’re still better off. Don’t give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you’re living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick. They’ll end up realizing that they’re the ones who need a bath. It’s better to suffer for doing good, if that’s what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad. That’s what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others’ sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all—was put to death and then made alive—to bring us to God.

**19-22** He went and proclaimed God’s salvation to earlier generations who ended up in the prison of judgment because they wouldn’t listen. You know, even though God waited patiently all the days that Noah built his ship, only a few were saved then, eight to be exact—saved from the water by the water. The waters of baptism do that for you, not by washing away dirt from your skin but by presenting you through Jesus’ resurrection before God with a clear conscience. Jesus has the last word on everything and everyone, from angels to armies. He’s standing right alongside God, and what he says goes.

**Commentary:**  Here Peter addresses the question of suffering and innocent suffering.  It appears some sort of human suffering is unavoidable.  Everyone has “a cross to bear” as the old saying goes!  Peter makes the point that it is far better to suffer for some good cause, than to do something wrong and selfish so as to deserve suffering!  That is never good!

Then he goes on to draw a parallel between the waters of the great flood (through which every living creature and creation itself was saved) and the waters of baptism (through which we experience eternal life in Christ Jesus.)  Indeed, the symbolism for baptism is literally dying and rising in Christ!

The whole gospel message is promoted through the sacred waters.  Peter expresses a great summation of the gospel when he states that the word of the cross works: “by presenting you through Jesus’ resurrection before God with a clear conscience.”

All of our salvation is tied up in the great mystery and miracle that results from the drama Jesus lives through the cross and the empty tomb.  He knew it would not be easy, but He knew it was necessary for God to pay and to experience fully what humanity could not do nor accomplish on our own!  “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Godself and not counting our sins against us.”  Rather, through Christ and Jesus’ perfect sacrifice, our sins are redeemed as heaven’s doors are flung wide open for all who accept God’s love, believe, and desire new life!

Thanks be to God!

Amen

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**Mark 1: 9-15**

**The Message**

**9-11** At this time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. The moment he came out of the water, he saw the sky split open and God’s Spirit, looking like a dove, come down on him. Along with the Spirit, a voice: “You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.”

God’s Kingdom Is Here

**12-13** At once, this same Spirit pushed Jesus out into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by Satan. Wild animals were his companions, and angels took care of him.

**14-15** After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the Message of God: “Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message.”

**Commentary:**  Finally Jesus speaks the wonderful words of life in Mark’s opening chapter!

With breathtaking speed, in six short verses, Mark takes us from baptism by John in the Jordan, to 40 days of Temptation in the Wilderness, exposed to Satan, tended by animals and angels!  To preaching in Galilee after John’s arrest: “Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand, turn around and believe God’s Message!  The Right Time Has Come!”

As I shared in my opening remarks, this message seems appropriate as I announce my retirement and we move to a new phase of our spiritual journey.  Zion’s will carry on your mission and ministry from God for Pottstown and the world.  You will continue to be fed spiritually and physically by your life together as the living body of Christ.  Diane and I will always cherish our life together with you for these last seven years.  God in Christ will continue to be with all of us,…guide, protect and help us in all circumstances;  and at last unite us forever in the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

This is our hope and guarantee by the promises of God.

Amen.

Pastor Austin