



**Redeemer Lutheran Church of Leisure World and
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Worship and Discipleship by Margo Geesing
“Covenants”

Now that we have entered the time of Lent, I'm going back just two weeks to cover the entire Lenten saga. This Lent, pay particular attention to the first lessons. We will be going through the covenants that God has made with his people. God always initiates these covenants, man responds, then man breaks his part of the agreement, God retries in a different way, and it goes on. During this Lent we will be looking at these various covenants and their connection to the Gospel.

The first Sunday of Lent the first lesson is from the end of the flood story. In this story God saves a small portion of people and agrees to be their God if they will follow him. God allows it to rain for 40 days and nights. At the end he places his bow in the sky as a promise to never destroy the earth again in water. This is the first of many covenants God will make with man. That theme of 40 days and nights is reflected in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus is sent into the desert for that same amount of time. 40 as a time period reoccurs often in the Bible. It usually signifies a time period of cleansing as it did in both these stories. And so also is Lent 40 days and is our time of cleansing.

The second Sunday of Lent's first lesson is the story of Abraham's encounter with God and God's promise that he would have children even in his old age. This was a life changing encounter for Abraham and Sarah. In the Gospel lesson Jesus tells his followers that he was going to have to go to Jerusalem to die. This was a life changing moment for his followers also. Take a moment in your own life and look at your own encounters with God. *How have they changed your life?*

The third Sunday of Lent begins with the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. This is the third major covenant that God has given man and the first to the whole of the Jewish people. It is so important that we still follow it. It was a sign of God's power and promise. It is the basic of how to treat God and one another in the simplest form. Jesus came and also gave us the Beatitudes which is the how to put the Law into action. In the Gospel we have Jesus consumed with zeal and causing a ruckus in the Temple! Jesus was fighting against the "laws" put on the people. "They" had turned the worship of God into a money making, follow the rules, marketed, manipulative farce. Jesus was trying to get back to the basics! Jesus knows that HE is the way to the Father, not following all the rules and regulations. Rules and regulations are supposed to be there to guide people not keep them from knowing God's love and mercy. *In what ways do we still create barriers to God in our own lives and for others? What presently enables you to follow Jesus: the laws, his signs, his words? Why? How? What makes it difficult for you to follow Jesus: the laws, his signs, his words? Why? How?*

Fourth Sunday of Lent we have direct references in the Gospel lesson to the first lesson (see, it's not just me making this stuff up!). We start with God healing the Israelites. It is again one of those moment that we hear about, especially in the Old Testament, where the people of God (and that includes us, also BTW) started grumbling and complaining. They "forgot" about the fact that God had brought them out of slavery and was feeding them on their long journey (made longer by their own actions). It was a case of "yes, but what have you done for me lately" so they turned away from Moses and God. God gets a little ticked off and punishes them (what any good parent would do!). The Israelites change their ways and repent. God accepts them back and gives Moses a way to heal them. Moses is told to make a snake and raise it up on a staff and all who looks on it will be healed. So, it is also with Jesus. Those who look believe in the Christ on the cross will also be healed, but more than that, they will have eternal life. God does not take away the snakes that were biting the Israelites, nor did he take away the cross that Jesus was to die on, nor does he take away our own trials and pain. Instead, God gave them a way to live with these issues as he does for us also. *What are some of the issues you are dealing with in your own life that needs God's healing? How do you see, or can you see, Jesus walking with you during these times? Is this the time to deepen your prayer life or is it a time that prayer is hard?*

On the fifth Sunday of Lent, we hear from the prophet Jeremiah and the promise of a new covenant from God. The people of Israel are in exile, again, because they turned away from God, again. God is promising to take his people back and to write the covenant on their hearts. A promise to forgive. A promise to forget. God has made the covenant simpler. I will be your God; you will be my people. This covenant is fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In the Gospel for this Sunday, Jesus gives us the requirements for eternal life: hate your life, follow him, serve him, and glorify the Father's name. He also says we need to be like grains of wheat. We must die to ourselves to produce much fruit. We use wheat in our communion bread. This is actual grain that has died and is used to produce much fruit when we receive it. Jesus in communion comes to strengthen us and through that communion, we are to go and produce much fruit. *Is the covenant of God written in your heart? If so, how is this directing your life? Is God your God or is something else taking His place? Are you producing much fruit from your communion with Jesus or is he lying dormant in you? How are you doing with those requirements for eternal life (some of it seems quite hard to me!)? Is now the time you need to take to redirect parts of your life?*

Then we have the pageantry of Palm/Passion Sunday. We get two Gospel stories today. We begin with the Gospel of Mark or John and that triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Crowds cheering and waving palm branches. Jesus comes and is cheered as **King**. In the first and second lessons we hear of Jesus as the **Servant**. He empties himself of his power and protection. Jesus trusts in the Father and His plan. He doesn't fight back. He isn't looking for status or glory. He is here to do the Father's will. And the Passion follows from the Gospel of Mark. In this Gospel account we see Jesus as a helpless **Victim**. In this telling of his death Jesus only speaks four times from the time they came to get him in the garden until his death. He is done in. *So, which is the true Jesus? Is he a King, a Servant, or a Victim? Or is he all three? How do you see Jesus during these moments? How do you see yourself in relation to Jesus? How do you present Jesus to others in the way you live your life?*

The last Sunday of March is Easter Sunday! This is THE day of our faith life. Everybody is born, everybody dies, NOBODY else has risen from the dead by their own power, only Jesus! Terror and amazement, these are the two words that come to the forefront in this Gospel from Mark. This Gospel passage ends with: “...*they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*” [Mark 16:8]. For how many of us, is this our own response to Jesus? How often do we, after everything we know and have experienced with Jesus, are too afraid to say anything? We do, as good Christians and, by definition, followers of Christ, need to speak out about our faith. In word. In song. In actions. In care. In love. In story. The same things that Jesus did!

We have the Passion of Jesus from Mark on Palm Sunday (and John on Good Friday – you can find the Scripture reference in the list of Lessons for the month); the institution of the Eucharist (2nd Lesson) and the washing of the disciples’ feet (from John) for Maundy Thursday. Take time to see the path that Jesus and we went on to get to Easter Sunday.