

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Lent is a special period of time, set aside for reflection, self-denial, prayer, study, and acts of mercy as we approach the holy week and Easter Sunday.

As Christians we are to find ourselves journeying towards the cross, drawing nearer week by week.

This week’s Genesis text teaches us that as we start our journey, it is not just we humans but all of God’s creatures that are invited into this journey. Plants, animals, the entire earth itself, join with humanity on this spiritual homecoming, through the covenants established between God and creation thousands years ago.

The creation story in Genesis 1 shows us God who was so happy and content creating the planet and all the creatures in it. Each and every phase of this creative activity bears the personal fingerprints of God.

The human beings God creates live in close relationship with God; they are not only dependent on God but they are also dependent upon their fellow creatures for sustaining their lives.

But things fall apart as human beings break away from the covenant established between God and humans. Adam and Eve disobey God’s commandment and then they blame each other for what happened; their two sons, Cain and Abel, become rivals and eventually one kills the other.

Sounds familiar? Well, unfortunately, that’s the beginning of human history and that’s the story of human lives we hear every day here and now.

And here comes the flood story. Genesis 6:12-13 says, “God saw that the earth was corrupt and filled with violence” and God decided to “make an end of all flesh.” So God sends rain on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights. Every living creature dies except one family: Noah and his family.

As we start a new spiritual journey on this first Sunday of Lent, I hear from this familiar Noah’s story that God does not like human pride.

God wants us to know that God is the only God and humans are only humans: a very simple truth.

The president of the United States cannot be God; the president of the most powerful nation on the earth can do many things others cannot but there are many things even Obama cannot do. Bill Gates cannot be God; money has power but there are things even money cannot buy.

When I went to Korea last week, I once again realized how blessed we are: you get on the plane and a couple of meals later you arrive there in Korea and get to teach a class there and come back here in the Bay Area and get to teach another class a few days later. Isn't that something? What a small world!

Thanks to scientists and engineers, we do things people never dreamed of doing 100 years ago. The wisdom and knowledge human beings have are just remarkable. It is just amazing to see what humans do nowadays. But still, human beings cannot be God. Humans are human; we are not perfect; we make mistakes; we have shortcomings; we hurt other people; and we displease God.

So in this season of Lent, we are invited to contemplate on who we are as humans and where we are in our journey.

Life is short. We could be called by God any moment; young or old, you never know; anyone could be called first.

So let us take our time seriously.

I told you that my mother cannot talk because of a stroke she had last year. But when I saw her last week, she was doing a lot better than last year. I was very happy to see her even if it was just a couple of hours. And my brother said to me "I kiss mom every day.... I am very thankful for how she is."

We really need to enjoy life and be thankful for who we are and where we are.

During this Lenten season, however, I want us to go a little deeper in

our faith.

Christian discipleship should be more than just being thankful for who I am and where I am.

As Mark says today, Jesus did not just stay home thinking that he was thankful for who he was and where he was. As soon as he was baptized, the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness. In the wilderness, he had to deal with hunger and cold; he had to face the challenge of worldly temptations; he even had to deal with life threats by the wild beasts...

Jesus went through all these challenges and overcame them. And then, he went to Galilee where he had to work to meet the needs of all kinds of people.

During this Lent, we are asked by God to do a sort of inventory: spiritual inventory. We are asked to examine ourselves if we are on the right track; if we are really following the way Jesus went.

I know life is full of challenges; we are busy with our own things; but see what is most important in your life!

I really like the imagery of the rainbow in Noah’s flood story. Picture the beautiful image of a rainbow: the 7 colors: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet.

The rainbow does not come during a clear sky; it always comes after storms. Today’s Genesis text says “the bow was in the clouds.”

Can you imagine how excited Noah and his family were when they saw the beautiful colors in the sky after going through the long 40 days and nights of flood?

Matthew Henry says, “Humankind after the Flood is not different; the Flood has not improved humanity.” Then, why did God give such a sign of promise? Why did God punish humans with the flood to begin with?

That’s a good question we need to ask God.

Genesis 9:8-17; Mark 1:9-15; "Rainbow in Clouds"; 1st Sunday in Lent; March 1, 2009

But one thing we can say for sure is that in spite of human sin and violence, God has committed himself to his world; the unconditional covenant of the rainbow, by which he binds only himself.

God loves us no matter what. God sometimes sends us rain and when it rains, it may pour. But that does not mean that God does not love us.

It is rather the opposite; God has rainbow in cloud; and the thicker the cloud, the brighter the bow in the cloud. Amen.