

Lord, make these words to be your Word, that our hearts might become your Heart.

In today’s Gospel, we see Jesus beginning his public ministry in a marvelous way – baptized in the Jordan, breaking through to the surface and the Spirit coming like a dove, empowering Him for ministry; the voice of the Father with words of sweet affirmation, “*This is my Son whom I love, with Whom I am well pleased.*” Then, Mark tells us, immediately that same, sweet Spirit drove Him into the wilderness, where he endured forty days of hunger, and the deep temptation to subvert his whole mission before he even really began it.

We meet him here, in this wilderness, the one just anointed by the Holy Spirit and claimed as God’s own son but now enduring a time of trial, subject to very human experiences.

Those 40 days were a period of preparation for the life of hunger, fatigue and constant harassment that awaited him as He set out to preach and demonstrate the Good News of God’s Kingdom.

And they began his preparation for the Cross,

where all the sin in the world was waiting to attach itself to him.

He was beloved; he was tried in the wilderness, all at once. Both/And.

Jesus didn’t try to evade the desert, or Satan’s predations.

He turned and headed straight into them.

And God did not leave him alone; angels attended him, and wild animals.

It’s not either/or – it’s both/and, seeming contradiction but really God at work.

There is a troublesome both/and in our first reading, that wonderful rainbow and all the talk of God’s promise, and the covenant that he makes with “all living things” – what a nice story.

Except we skipped a few parts. Like that little detail about the flood.

One of the most troublesome passages in the Bible:

the story of all living life being wiped out, seemingly at God’s hand.

Who is this God who sent the rains and the flood, who preserved a

reproducible remnant of his glorious creation, and destroyed the rest?

Not, surely, the same Father who loves the life He has made?

Is this how we see God? As a genocidal monster, one who could wipe out all life, like a potter whose pot has gone haywire, mashing it back into wet clay again.

Do we think of ourselves as a species so fallen, so depraved,
it required virtual annihilation?

We might reject this story as distasteful, or dismiss it as a folktale
told by ancient peoples trying to make sense of a cataclysm, or just buy it.

But hat's either/or thinking. Both/and thinking invites us to say:

What meaning did those peoples gave to this event?

They saw in the flood and its aftermath was an occasion for God to make
a huge promise, a covenant with all living things, for life.

The story shows us God bringing new creation after the trauma,
new possibilities, new relationships, new promises. New life.

It's not good news or bad, either/or – it's both/and.

Both/And is where we live as People of the Way, who follow Jesus.

Those who like their theology without any shades of grey,
their lines firmly drawn, will not go very far in following Jesus.

You need to embrace paradox if you're going to be a Christian.

Our more fundamentalist brethren seem to have difficulty with paradox and
nuance, and so twist themselves and the Word of God into pretzels
trying to unify it in a linear, rational way.

It won't work. Nicodemus found that out in a hurry, when he sought Jesus out.
"You can't figure it all out up here," Jesus told him.

"The realm of God is only knowable by spirit."

And at the very heart of our faith is the biggest both/and of all:

That Jesus, whom we worship as the incarnate Son of God,
was fully human and fully divine, both, all at the same time.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it!

But that both/and leads right to another, equally implausible – us.

We also have two natures at the same time:

We are simultaneously sinful and redeemed. *Simul justus et peccator*,
said Martin Luther, both justified and sinner.

We are people of contradiction,
simultaneously sinners because we seek our own way, and saints,
because the Father said so and Jesus made it so and the Spirit keeps it so.

We have the human nature given us at birth, and the God nature given us
at baptism, and we live in both operating systems, if you will.

Our spiritual work is to let the God nature do more and more of the operating.

That's why we too go into wilderness during Lent, spiritually – to open ourselves to the power of God's Spirit and come to know Jesus more fully.

We come to know Jesus as both the fully human man he was, bound in his time and culture and genetic code – AND the fully divine, Son of God he was, who gave away all his privilege, his prerogatives to enter into our condition and lead us into the Life that really is life, the life that endures for eternity and beyond.

If holding two opposing realities at once is hard for you,

there is a simple way to begin to cultivate both/and thinking:

banish the word "but" from your vocabulary. "But" is a negating word.

Replace it with "And." "It is a beautiful day but really cold." You've negated it.

"It's a beautiful AND really cold." Still two true statements, but there's room.

"I love you, but you make me so mad when you..." Do you feel loved?

"I love you, AND I get so angry when you..." - Two true statements, held together.

"God gave us this earth, but climate change is making it uninhabitable."

A dead end. Bad news.

"God gave us this earth, and climate change is making it uninhabitable."

The "and" leaves us room for hope, where the "but" cancels it out.

I challenge you to try to hear your "buts" and replace them with "ands."

This man we meet in that river and then in that desert today is also

available to us in prayer, in his word, in the sacraments.

I invite us to join him in the places we encounter him this Lent,

and come to know him for ourselves, more deeply than we ever have before.

That's how the God nature in us takes over.

Amen.

Genesis 9:8-17

God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."