

2.21.21 L1 God is With Us in the Extremes of Life

- The extremes of life have become commercialized entertainment
 - Extreme reality shows are among the top-rated television programs –
 - Programs like Survivor Island, the Amazing Race, or Ice Road Truckers where you can watch tractor trailer drivers deliver the goods on the icy and treacherous roads of northern Alaska
 - Or there are personal extremes – Tough-As-Nails, My 600 Pound Life, or Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern where you can watch him eat things like deep fried tarantulas
 - And then there are the extremes in relationships – The Bachelor, Millionaire Matchmaker, or Married at First Sight where you can watch people who have never met get married
 - Does anyone really think that’s a good idea?
 - What is it about the extremes of life that attract us? Are we enjoying the guilty pleasure of seeing people win at all costs, engage in risky behavior, or mess up their lives?
- Yet there is so much visceral appeal to the extremes!
- Now in today’s scripture, we also hear about two biblical situations that are even tougher and more extreme than a reality show
 - The first extreme situation is from Genesis
 - The people of the world had been sinful, violent, and untrustworthy, so God decided to start over
 - Sending a flood, God wiped out all living things, except for Noah and his family, and the creatures living in the ark
 - Then after the flood waters drained away, God made a covenant with Noah and all of creation never again to destroy the world
 - And as sign to assure humanity, and a sign to remind God of God’s promise, God placed a rainbow in the sky
 - This extreme story has several layers

- It is a story of God's anger and judgement, and a fresh start for what had been a sinful creation
- This is a story of irony, because soon after today's reading, Noah and his sons and their descendants reverted to sinful, violent, and untrustworthy behavior
- And this is a story of hope, because the promise and the rainbow remind us that despite sin and evil, God will never again destroy the world to start over
- The second extreme story is that after his baptism, Jesus was driven into the wilderness for forty days.
 - The wilderness – a harsh place, a place with little food and water
 - The wilderness – a place of isolation, exile, and wild and dangerous beasts
 - The wilderness – the place where Jesus was tempted by Satan
 - And yet, in a little comment that we so often miss, the Gospel of Mark tells us that there in the wilderness, the angels of heaven waited on Jesus
- The aftermath of the flood with the water draining away, and the wilderness where there was very little food or water – both settings were extreme places... and there IN THOSE EXTREMES, God was there to make a promise Noah, and God's angels were there to serve Jesus
- Maybe we are so fascinated by the extremes of television, books, and movies, because it helps us to cope with and giggle at the extremes of our lives. But the truth is...
 - Sometimes our lives are good, but other times our lives are like a highway pile-up
 - Sometimes our relationships are great, but other times some or all of our relationships are on the rocks
 - Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by the flood of stuff that inundates our lives, and other times we feel alone and abandoned in the wilderness
 - And of course, right now we are in the midst of a pandemic – perhaps the most extreme medical crisis in the last 100 years

- But here's the thing – God came to Noah on the still-muddy earth to make a covenantal promise of life.
- The angels of God came into the harsh and dangerous wilderness to serve Jesus.
- And therefore we are reminded, we are assured, we are comforted, that in the extremes of OUR lives and even now in the midst of THIS pandemic, ***that God has not, and will not abandon us.***
- Remember for a moment that there are many names for Jesus
 - His given name, “Jesus,” means, “The Lord saves”
 - The title “Christ” in Greek, or “Messiah” in Hebrew, means “the anointed one of God”
 - And the name “Emmanuel,” spoken by the angel of the Lord to Joseph before the birth of Jesus, means ***“God with us”***
- The extreme stories of God with Noah, and God with Jesus, remind and assure us that even now, Jesus promises to be with us in the most extreme situations of our lives wherever and whenever two or more are gathered in his name,
 - ...the Holy Spirit of God promises to empower the Word of God's forgiving and life-giving promises in the best of times and the worst of times,
 - ...the crucified and risen Christ promises to come into us wherever we receive his Body and Blood – even a parking lot this past Wednesday,
 - ...and God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit has promised ever since our baptisms to stand beside us through all the extremes of life and even death, because God has taken extreme action,
 - ... through Jesus Christ crucified and raised we have had our sin washed away, we have been given the promise of life, and we have been adopted and made Sons and daughters.