

“Mt. Ararat”

Genesis 8:1-4

During this Lenten Season, we are going to look back to that which is ancient and look forward to that which is new. We begin our Lenten pilgrimage journeying to the mountains of the Bible. As a literary motif, few things are thought of as ancient as mountains. Lent is the bridge between the Mt. of Transfiguration and Mt. Calvary. As we cross that bridge over the next six weeks, we look at a range of Biblical mountains. All of the mountains that we will see are important for our salvation. All of them have a message for us.

This evening, we look at Mt. Ararat. Ararat is the first mountain named in the Bible. Ararat is really not just one mountain, but refers to an entire high mountain range where the ark with Noah, his family, and lots of animals first came to rest on dry ground after 40 days of rain and 150 days at sea. The ark came to rest at Ararat and humanity got an opportunity to start over.

We all have reached a time or a place where we were convinced that it

was time to start over. In the past 12 months, how many of you have wanted to just do a total reset? Really, each day holds that opportunity. A new job or career offers us that chance to start something new. Moving to a new city is often thought of as the solution to reset your life and have a fresh start.

If you long for things to be made new? Remember your Baptism. When Luther speaks of Baptism, he says, “the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sin and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” When you take that new job or move to that new city, you will find that your Old Adam came with you.

When Noah and the rest of the passengers on the ark landed on Ararat, it was a new start for all of mankind. There was only one family. They were God-fearing people gathered around the altar of the Lord. What a beautiful beginning! Except that each of them were children of Adam and Eve.

God sent the flood to cleanse the world of the wicked, adulterous people who had forsaken God, but the seeds of destruction were still in those people rescued in the ark. Their human nature was still totally corrupt. They were sinners. They were rebels against God. Soon after

landing on Ararat, the family was torn with strife. Rather than a “new man” emerging daily out of the baptismal waters, sin was daily raising its ugly head in and among the people, and within a generation, some of the descendants of Noah had forsaken God and gone their own way.

Ararat was not the perfect answer to starting over. Just starting over is not enough. Sin was not dealt with at Ararat. The world would have to wait for that to happen on another mountain. Noah and his family had good intentions, they listened to God’s command to build the ark, they trusted His Word that wrath and judgment was coming upon the earth, but the sin in them would have to be defeated on another mountain.

You and I face “Ararats” each day. And we get tired of our constant mistakes and vow to start over. We repent and confess our sins – that we are poor, miserable sinners. Our Old Adam desires to do that which is contrary to God’s will and fights against us every day. Like Noah, we have good intentions, and we strive to listen to God’s commands. We speak words that confess that we trust His Word and have been warned of the wrath and judgment to come; yet sin remains.

Like St. Paul we cry out: “For I know that nothing good dwells in me,

that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good that I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” Why is this? The answer is that only God can heal us. Only God can change us. Going to Ararat, starting over is not enough. We need to be changed by God. We have been changed by God. We were made new in Baptism. Remember your Baptism, and know that God is patient and merciful.

Hear the words of St. Peter when He speaks of God’s patience “in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you.”

A thousand new beginnings without the mercy and forgiveness of God are futile. As Noah discovered, it is only more of the same. But through the blood of Jesus Christ who triumphed at the other mountain, Mt. Calvary, there is forgiveness with God. Ararat has an ark on it. Calvary has a cross. The ark was only a temporary fix. The healing that Christ brings is permanent. In Christ, we are changed and truly have a new beginning. Amen.