

First Sunday in Lent
Sermon Text: Genesis 9:8-17
Related Text: 1 Peter 3:18-22
Date Preached: March 1, 2009

In the name of the crucified and risen Christ; Amen.

Often times when the mail comes there will be included a credit card offer. In large print will be some of the details that will appeal to the borrower. The goal of course is that the company wants us to use their card. What they put in much finer print is the details surrounding the terms of such credit.

Of course, the terms listed in the agreement are made by the company. They will loan us money, but these are the conditions you must meet to repay the money. In many respects this is a one-sided agreement.

One sided agreements are hardly new. One sided agreements known as covenants existed well back to the beginning of human existence. In the Old Testament, covenants were a common expression of relationship between God and God's people. The difference between the offers of credit card companies and God is that God's agreements are meant for our best good.

Over the course of Lent we will hear a lot about covenants from our Old Testament readings. Like

today's reading from Genesis we have an example of a covenant God made with humanity. This is conveyed directly to Noah and his family. God initiates the covenant.

I am establishing my covenant with you. I will never again destroy the earth with a flood. I will set a bow in the clouds to remember this covenant I am making. Noah and his sons have nothing to say. They don't get a say in the shape of this covenant. They simply receive God's Word and promise.

Too often, we have trouble with such covenants. We fall into the trap of feeling that there must be something on our end of the covenant. Likewise, when some receive the promises of God, we sometimes get irritated if we don't see any commitment on the behalf of the recipient.

Such is the case of baptisms. Many of us, and I must say myself and my colleagues included, lament that the only time we may see a couple and their child in worship is at the time of the child's baptism.

In the liturgy of Holy Baptism, we hear the covenant God is making. We hear God's promise of forgiveness of sins. We hear God's promise of everlasting life. We receive and remember God's

grace not only for the child being baptized but also for ourselves.

And then we hear the questions addressed to the parents. Will you bring your child to the services of God's house? Will you teach them the Lord's Prayer, 10 Commandments and the Creed? Will you nurture them in the faith? Will you help them live a godly life? We'll hear parents answer yes.

Sinners that we are, it is easy to judge those who do not come as failing to keep the promises they have made. Truth be told, there are times when every parent, sponsor, god-parent and congregation, us included, have failed to keep these promises. For just as it is covenantal for the parents to fulfill their responsibilities, the same holds true for those of us in the congregation that pledge our support when we welcome each baptized member into the household of faith.

The question then that leads us to ask is why God would initiate such covenants. Why is God bound and determined to keep the covenant while giving us the freedom to say, not today God.

God is first the faithful partner in this covenantal relationship. God's enters into this relationship with

us freely. We are created in the image of God. Thus, created we are special to God.

God created us to live in relationship with him, with our environment and with each other. It is God's desire that we would be as eager to live in this loving covenantal relationship as he is. He knows we can't do it on our own. That is why he made the most significant covenant of all. It is a covenant sealed in blood.

Jesus Christ is the faithful one in God's covenant on our behalf. It is he who resists the temptations we experience day after day. His commitment to God and to us runs so deep that he would suffer death. His faithfulness to God was such that he'd go to the greatest of depths to save those who had already died.

God's one-sided relationship is meant to draw us back to himself. In this season of Lent we hear the invitation to repent. It is an invitation to turn from our selfishness, our agendas and our terms for a relationship with God.

All that is called in this grace-filled relationship is to be the recipients of God's grace. Even this, we can only do by the help of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy

Spirit that helps us believe the depths of God's love in Christ.

It is the Spirit then that leads us to live out this grace in how we treat and love one another. That is the covenant God makes with us. It is God's promise to live with us and that living with him we also live in grace with our neighbor. AMEN.