

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 16th 2017

I find myself wondering how the animals felt during today's Genesis narrative. You've just survived the massive extinction event known as "the Flood," and you've proceeded to survive through 40 days at sea on a cramped ark. You've finally made it to land and are ready for a fresh start. And then...God basically curses you. Your human deliverers will become your feared enemies, preying on you for food, labor and clothing. Your environment will be turned over to man for occupation and subjugation. And if you try to defend yourself and kill the man, God will demand your blood! Animals receive a raw deal in this narrative, as they have through so much of human history.

Likewise, I find myself wondering about Peter's perspective during this crucial turning point in Mark's gospel. This Jesus came into your home and healed your mother-in-law. You left your fishing career behind to follow him on the Way. You've been ostracized from your own religious community, and since the death of John the Baptist you've been a political fugitive as well. Now Jesus is leading you into the foreign Gentile territory of Caesarea Phillipi. In this high-intensity situation, you've had the courage and foresight to declare Jesus as "the Anointed," the chosen one of God. And now, far from embracing your messianic vision, this Jesus has declared that he is going to suffer and die, and he has castigated you as "Satan" for expressing your reservations. This narrative reads the Tale of Two Peters – it was the best of times, it was the worst of times...

In the midst of these stormy narratives of betrayal and blood, the rainbow emerges as a sign of hope. Animals may have a raw deal, but they are party to God's eternal covenant. Humans may subjugate the land, but their destiny is ultimately caught up with all animal life. Peter can be a stumbling block, but his bold confession underlies the Christian community's vision of Jesus the Christ. Jesus will suffer and die, but he will also rise after 3 days. Our world is far from Eden, but the floods of life do not have the last word. In the midst of the storm, keep an eye out for the rainbow.

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