

Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

February 18, 2024

The Reverend David E. Fox

First Sunday in Lent (Year B) 2024

1 Peter 3:18-22

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

When I was around the age of 7 or 8, my father took me to buy a new pair of shoes. My other shoes were worn out and just didn't fit anymore. I liked white shoes, but Dad liked black shoes. He claimed they were easier to clean. So you can just guess what color the shoes were that he bought. That's right, they were black. I was pretty grateful to get a new pair of shoes, no matter if they were black; because it was a once-a-year thing for me to get a new pair of shoes.

The first thing my dad told me was that I needed to make sure to wear my worn-out shoes when I went outside in order to keep my new shoes clean.

That very next day I went to daycare at Mother Hubbard's Nursery, where I went every weekday. I had forgotten my worn-out shoes to wear outside and was left to wear my new shoes to play in. I thought I would be extra careful and everything would be all right. But, who was I kidding?

A group of boys and I were playing "war" in the woods. There was a dried up creek bed that my buddy Shawn and I had to cross. We were lucky, because there was this nice fat tree that was lying right over the dried up creek bed, so we were going to walk on it to get to the other side. Well, Shawn made it across about the time I made it to the middle of the log; and then it happened, I lost my balance and fell feet first into the mud. I tried to get as much of the mud off as I could, but these shoes were nearly ruined. I just knew that my dad was going to give me a good whooping when I got home.

In today's epistle, we are referenced back to Genesis and the story of Noah. Do you remember the story of Noah and the ark? Well, let me tell you the abbreviated version. The world had become a wicked place, and it was filled with evil people. Genesis says that human wickedness was immense "and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." God was down right upset that God had even made humankind. God grieved over the whole situation. God became angry and decided that he was going to destroy the earth with a flood.

God liked Noah, he was very obedient; so God told Noah to build an ark that would hold his family, all of the animals, and enough food to last until the flood had passed. Then the

rains came and all things that were not on the ark were destroyed, and the earth was cleansed of its evil. Human flesh was put to death.

1Peter, to the point of today's reading, talks about the suffering for doing right. "Do not repay evil with evil or abuse with abuse, instead repay with a blessing; for the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and he will not even turn his head toward those who do evil. Through your suffering do not fear what the wicked fear and do not be intimidated. For it is better to suffer doing God's will than it is to suffer for the evil that you do." Sounds like the people of Noah's day and the people of the time of 1Peter had some mud on their shoes.

Our world seems to be an evil place. And even the city that we call home can seem like an evil place. Last year, 2023, the City of Hampton had 29 murders; for Hampton Roads the total number of murders for the year was 197ⁱ. Around the globe, approximately eight million children go missing each year; nearly 2300 children are reported missing each day in the United Statesⁱⁱ. Shoplifting was up sixteen percent from 2019 to the first half of 2023, in twenty-four major U.S. citiesⁱⁱⁱ. The Mexican Cartel has hit Hampton Roads hard, causing the fentanyl crisis to escalate; The DEA reports that the number of pills that law enforcement has seized is up 260%^{iv}. The homeless walk around in the cold of winter looking for something to eat and a warm place to sleep. I shared with you a few weeks ago about the increase in those staying each night at H.E.L.P.'s winter shelter.

What do the people here at Gloria Dei look like? Are we feeding the hungry? Are we praying for our neighbors? Are we going to visit the person who sits beside us every Sunday who is not here today because they are in the hospital? Are we repaying evil with a blessing or are we repaying it with more evil? Are we cleaning up the world or are we just adding on to the abuse? Are we more worried about where our dollar in the offering plate is going for the yearly budget, or are we excited about reaching out to our community to share the love of Christ? What are we doing to suffer for God's will? It sounds like our world, our city, and we ourselves have some mud on our shoes.

Well, my day was pretty much ruined because I knew that a whooping was in store for me. It was time for one of my parents to come pick me up, and I was just praying that it wasn't dad. But it was. He saw my shoes, and he knew what had happened. The disappointment on his face caused me to tear up. When we got home, he told me to take off my shoes. He got a bucket of water and a rag and began to scrub my shoes until all of the mud was gone. He had turned my nearly ruined shoes back into a brand new pair. He gave them back to me without saying a word and I didn't get the whooping I deserved.

God destroyed the flesh of the world by the flood and at the same time with the same flood he saved Noah and his family. They were carried safely in the ark and made it through to live their lives outside of the animal-filled ark.

In our Old Testament reading for today: after the waters had subsided, God cut a covenant with Noah that he would never cut off all flesh by the waters of a flood and never would there be a flood to destroy the earth. This was a covenant to all.

Then in 1Peter, we are reminded of the suffering of Christ. Suffering that took him to his death. He was put to death in the flesh, but he was made alive in the spirit.

The scripture says that the resurrected Jesus went to proclaim the gospel of his resurrection to the spirits in prison, which are the ones who did not obey God and whom God waited patiently on in the days of Noah. It sounds to me like Jesus may have been splashing some water around in Hades.

Just as the rainbow was a sign of God's covenant with Noah, the resurrected Christ is the sign of God's new covenant with the world. The story does not end with Christ's resurrection; no, it is only the beginning of the rest of eternity.

What does this mean for us today? Well, all this talk about water has me excited. It means there is life beyond the grave. We are not left for dead. We have a God and a Savior who love us so much that they come down to us and bless us with their presence. Just as God came to Noah and told him that the flood was coming. Christ comes to us and tells us that a flood is coming. Not a flood that destroys the whole earth, just one that destroys our muddy flesh. Just as Noah and his family were saved by the flood, we too are saved by the flood waters of baptism.

We can't wash ourselves clean enough of the sinfulness in our lives to please God. So, he washes us clean in the waters of baptism. Down with the old person and up with the new. It is a death and a birth all at the same time. In the waters of baptism, Jesus is claiming us as his own. We become part of a new family, and on the Day of Judgment, we can stand before God and he won't see the mud that once was covering our lives but he will see a person that is pleasing to him.

Praise God from on high that God sent his only Son, Jesus, the righteous one to die for us, the unrighteous. Praise God for the waters of baptism that he places before us today. And Praise God that Christ's righteousness cleans more than a muddy pair of shoes.

ⁱ <https://www.13newsnow.com/article/news/crime/homicide-rates-slightly-drop-across-hampton-roads-2023/291-730a5af3-d44e-4bef-8368-7fb52c192d7b>

ⁱⁱ <https://safeatlast.co/blog/child-abduction-statistics/#gref>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.thestreet.com/retail/walmart-makes-a-major-change-to-prevent-theft-some-customers-will-hate-it>

^{iv} <https://www.wtkr.com/investigations/mexican-cartels-are-in-hampton-roads-260-increase-in-fentanyl-pills-seized-in-2023-dea>