

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa
Lent 1
February 21/22 2015

Genesis 9:8-17
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-13

My name is Mike and I am not an alcoholic.

I have however given up alcohol for Lent.

I did this for a number of reasons.

Our Bishop invited us all to join him in this discipline. His invitation grew out of the tragic events that happened just after Christmas in the Diocese of Maryland. On December 27, 2014 Bishop Heather Cook, an assistant bishop of the diocese of Maryland struck and killed a bicyclist, Thomas Palermo, a 41 year old husband and father of two. Heather Cook has since been arraigned on numerous charges related to her driving drunk and fleeing the scene of the crime. Our Bishop has invited us to join in abstaining from alcohol during Lent as a sign of our prayer for Mr. Palermo and his family. Fasting from alcohol during Lent is also a sign of our repentance for the unhealthy relationship the Episcopal Church sometimes has with alcohol. As a denomination we celebrate our holiest sacramental meal, the Eucharist, with wine. This will of course continue. But we are also at times a bit cavalier in our attitudes toward alcohol. Sometimes we turn a blind eye to the way our attitudes and our abuse of alcohol damages the lives of so many in and outside our congregations. Too often we laugh when we are stereotyped as drinkers, and we love to tell the jokes about our church and alcohol. We are after all whiskeypalians....and of course, whenever 4 Episcopalians gather together, there is always a fifth. Maybe, this is not all that funny.

I will try to abstain from using alcohol during Lent as a sign of support to many in our congregation who struggle with addictions.

I will try to abstain from alcohol during Lent, because I confess there have been times in my life when I have placed myself and others at risk because of drinking. When I have been drinking I have sometimes said and done things that I regret. When I drink, I have at times not treated my body as a temple of God. When I drink, I have at times wasted too much time and too much money.

My name is Mike and I am a sinner.

My sins are many and are really quite boring. Most likely my sins are not going to make the front page of any gossip website or magazine. Nonetheless, even boring sins cause pain. My sins do hurt those I love. My sins do damage my relationship with God. My sins make me less the person, the husband, the father, the priest, the Christian that God created me to be. My sins are part of the sin of the world, they add to the evil, violence and hatred that are destroying our

families, our community, our nation, and indeed our entire world. The truth is that my boring sins are as deadly as any addiction.

On this first Sunday of Lent, I confess I am a sinner, and that my sin has made my life unmanageable. I confess that by myself, I cannot overcome my sin. I confess that I need a power greater than myself to save me from my sin. I confess, dear friends, that I need a savior.

On this first Sunday of Lent, we celebrate that instead of punishing us for our sins, God sends Jesus to save us from our sin.

In Genesis, God makes a promise, a covenant with Noah that God will never again destroy the earth and earth's creatures because of sin. As a sign of this covenant, as a sign of this promise, God places the bow in the sky. This bow is both a rainbow, and it is also God's bow, God's weapon. God sets down his bow and unilaterally disarms. God will never again destroy the earth because of the sins of humankind. God will not destroy me because of my sin. God is not about punishing us for our sins; God is about saving us, healing us, freeing us from our sin. God hates sin because sin destroys the world, and the creatures that God loves. God sets his bow in the sky as a sign of the covenant. God asks Noah, God asks us to do the same. God has promised not to destroy the earth. Will we make the same promise? Our sins are the bows with which we destroy God's world. Will we pray for the desire, for the grace, for the courage to set them down?

In the Gospel Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, goes into the desert. There, in the desert, Jesus is tempted. Mark does not describe these temptations. For Mark, Jesus is tempted in the same ways, by the same things which tempt all of us. But in the face of those temptations, Jesus finds the support of the spirit and the messengers of God to overcome these temptations. This is the good news of Lent. As we face our sin, as we face our temptations—not only does God not seek to punish us—indeed God give us the strength to overcome them. God gives us the strength to overcome our temptations and sin. God gives us the strength to be God's instruments in overcoming evil in the world. As sons and daughters of God, and as disciples of Jesus, we are called to dedicate ourselves to saving and healing and freeing the world from evil.

My name is Mike. I am a sinner.

But as we begin our 40 day Lenten journey, I celebrate that my sin does not define me, our sin does not define us. God's forgiving love defines us. We are God's children. We are saved. We are empowered with God's Holy Spirit. We are disciples. We are loved. May this be the good news we believe. May this be the good news that saves the world from sin. May this be the good news we celebrate in the season of Lent and all the seasons of our life.