



**breadfortheworld**  
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

## February 26, 2012, First Sunday in Lent

*By Nicole L. Johnson*

Genesis 9:8–17

Psalm 25:1–10

1 Peter 3:18–22

Mark 1:9–15

### **Introduction**

On this First Sunday in Lent, the Scripture readings present some important themes as we ponder the journey toward Easter. From the hope symbolized by the rainbow in the Genesis flood narrative, to the psalmist's trust in God and Peter's emphasis on suffering in solidarity with the oppressed, to Jesus' preaching of the good news following his baptism, the readings call the community of Christ not only to renewed hope but also to a renewed witness for social justice.

### **Genesis 9:8–17**

This reading takes us to the denouement of the flood story; the waters have receded, the dove has returned with the olive leaf, Noah and his family have disembarked from the ark and have made burnt offerings, and now God makes a promise never similarly to destroy "all flesh" again. God makes a covenant with Noah and his family, the representatives of the rest of humankind, but that covenant extends beyond humanity: "I am establishing my covenant with you . . . and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you" (vv. 9–10) and, in fact, with "the earth" itself (v. 13). The implications of this covenant toward ecological justice are hard to miss; God's promise to protect the *entire* creation calls the faith community to see its own existence and well-being as tied together with the existence and well-being of the rest of the created order, so loved and protected by its creator. Humans are in covenant not only with one another and God but with the natural world as well.

The flip side of this relationship is that humankind's destruction is also tied to environmental destruction caused by irresponsible use of limited natural resources. Christianity's sense of environmental justice must be strengthened by God's promise to "remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh" (v. 15). The sign of this covenant is, of course, the rainbow "set . . . in the clouds" (v. 13) by God. The rainbow, like the dove carrying the olive leaf in Genesis 8, is a symbol of both peace and hope. The rainbow symbolizes the peace God grants to humans and the promise not to destroy life again using the waters of a flood. As a symbol of peace, the rainbow serves as a symbol and sign of hope. To "hope" means "to desire with expectation of obtainment" or "to expect with confidence."<sup>i</sup> Hope, the *expectation* that things will get better, not only gets us through the difficult times but also gives us strength to work proactively in the interest of a just and peaceful world. Hope helps communities to rebuild after a deathly and devastating natural disaster. Hope moves an addict through to the next day without succumbing to the desire to feed the addiction.



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Hope encourages the faith community to seek justice for all *now*, while waiting expectantly for the reign of Christ that will usher in pure justice. In a world that sometimes seems so lacking in hope, the Christian community is called to live that hope for others.

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<sup>i</sup> 1. "Hope," *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* 2010, Merriam-Webster Online; <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hope> (accessed February 27, 2010).