

The time is fulfilled

Mark 1:9-15 is very sparse and doesn't give the reader a lot of details. Read the story again out loud. Where are there gaps? What doesn't Mark say? Where are you left wondering, "What happened there?" How do you feel about the questions you have? Do you want answers? Or are you more excited by not knowing?

It can be helpful in our secular culture to notice that baptism is followed by temptation and then ministry. And the ministry seems to happen in the midst of continuing trials and temptations (since v. 14 refers to John's arrest for preaching truth). Do you expect your life in the world to be one of torment or, at least, inner wrestling as your faith values come into conflict with the cultural values around you? Or do you expect to have answers to those temptations? Do you think about it at all?

And how do you feel about the big gap here? Note that this text does not say that Jesus withstood the temptations. It doesn't seem to matter to Mark; what matters is the ministry in spite of the temptations.

☞ Take a moment to ponder the temptations in your own life. You may find it helpful to refer to KingofPeace.org/selfexamination.pdf, which contains an informative list of sins from St. Augustine's Prayer Book. Notice which ones you can resist easily. What gives you the strength to do that? Notice the ones that are harder to resist. What makes them more difficult? Choose one this week and recall one instance when you submitted to the temptation and one when you were able to remain steady. What or who made the difference?



Lent 1

Week of February 26, 2012

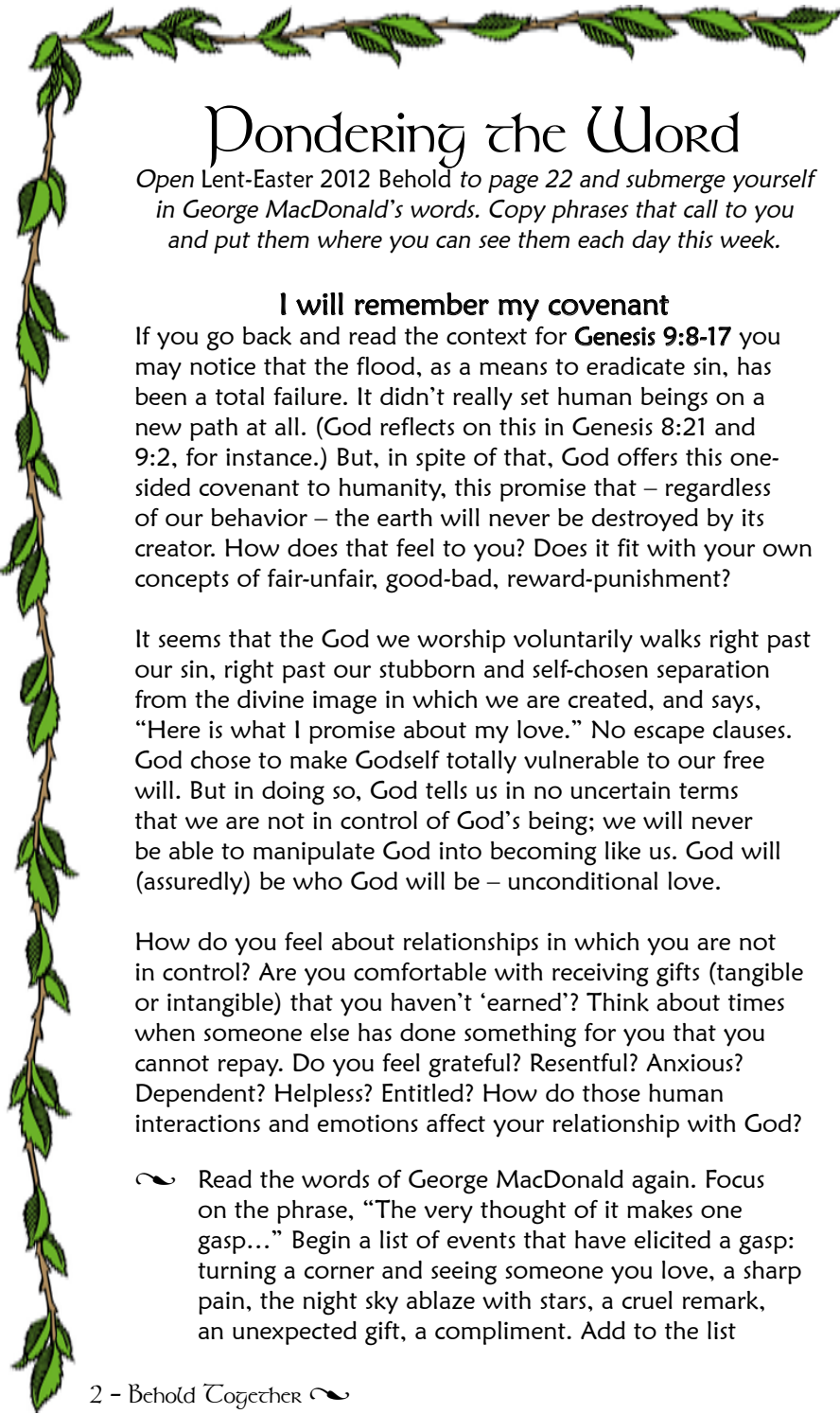
Genesis 9:8-17/Psalm 25:1-10/1 Peter 3:18-22/
Mark 1:9-15

Finding Center

Fill a beautiful goblet with water and set it into your meditation space for this week. Use the following prayer or your own words as an invitation before you read scripture, journal, or meditate.

Creator God, with an explosion of love,
you set me afloat deep under the surface of womb-waters.
Draw me now, again, beneath those waters of rebirth.
Redeemer God, in a drenching flood of faith,
you swept me into the baptismal storm --
chaotic journey from separation to surrender.
Spill me into that tempest now, again, to relearn your
buoyant grace.
Sustainer God, from a brimming chalice of hope,
you filled me with your eternal renewal.
Pour me out now as refreshment for those who thirst.
Let it be so.

As you move through this week, consider each of the reflections and exercises offered or focus on only one.



Pondering the Word

Open Lent-Easter 2012 Behold to page 22 and submerge yourself in George MacDonald's words. Copy phrases that call to you and put them where you can see them each day this week.

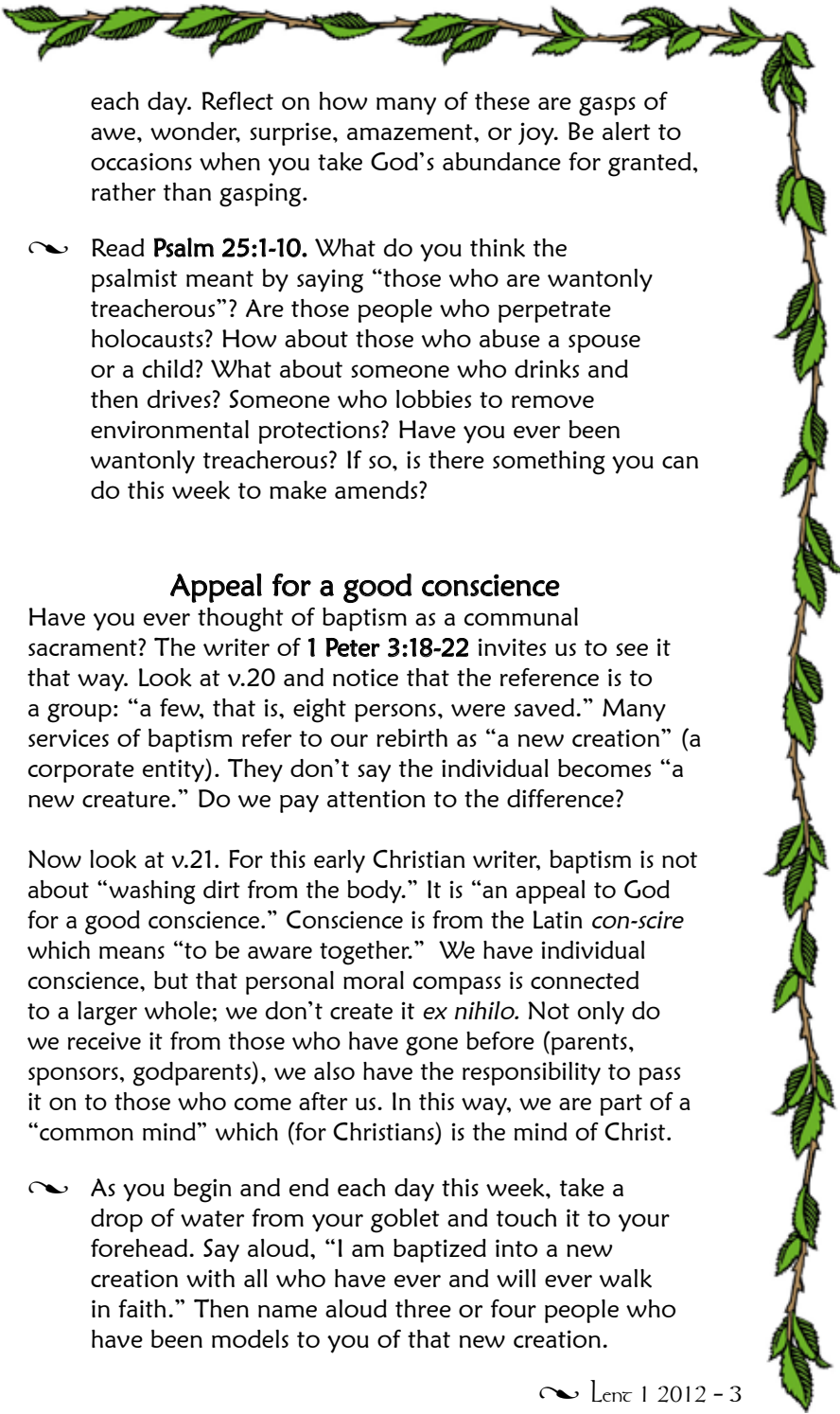
I will remember my covenant

If you go back and read the context for **Genesis 9:8-17** you may notice that the flood, as a means to eradicate sin, has been a total failure. It didn't really set human beings on a new path at all. (God reflects on this in Genesis 8:21 and 9:2, for instance.) But, in spite of that, God offers this one-sided covenant to humanity, this promise that – regardless of our behavior – the earth will never be destroyed by its creator. How does that feel to you? Does it fit with your own concepts of fair-unfair, good-bad, reward-punishment?

It seems that the God we worship voluntarily walks right past our sin, right past our stubborn and self-chosen separation from the divine image in which we are created, and says, "Here is what I promise about my love." No escape clauses. God chose to make Godself totally vulnerable to our free will. But in doing so, God tells us in no uncertain terms that we are not in control of God's being; we will never be able to manipulate God into becoming like us. God will (assuredly) be who God will be – unconditional love.

How do you feel about relationships in which you are not in control? Are you comfortable with receiving gifts (tangible or intangible) that you haven't 'earned'? Think about times when someone else has done something for you that you cannot repay. Do you feel grateful? Resentful? Anxious? Dependent? Helpless? Entitled? How do those human interactions and emotions affect your relationship with God?

☞ Read the words of George MacDonald again. Focus on the phrase, "The very thought of it makes one gasp..." Begin a list of events that have elicited a gasp: turning a corner and seeing someone you love, a sharp pain, the night sky ablaze with stars, a cruel remark, an unexpected gift, a compliment. Add to the list



each day. Reflect on how many of these are gasps of awe, wonder, surprise, amazement, or joy. Be alert to occasions when you take God's abundance for granted, rather than gasping.

☞ Read **Psalm 25:1-10**. What do you think the psalmist meant by saying "those who are wantonly treacherous"? Are those people who perpetrate holocausts? How about those who abuse a spouse or a child? What about someone who drinks and then drives? Someone who lobbies to remove environmental protections? Have you ever been wantonly treacherous? If so, is there something you can do this week to make amends?

Appeal for a good conscience

Have you ever thought of baptism as a communal sacrament? The writer of **1 Peter 3:18-22** invites us to see it that way. Look at v.20 and notice that the reference is to a group: "a few, that is, eight persons, were saved." Many services of baptism refer to our rebirth as "a new creation" (a corporate entity). They don't say the individual becomes "a new creature." Do we pay attention to the difference?

Now look at v.21. For this early Christian writer, baptism is not about "washing dirt from the body." It is "an appeal to God for a good conscience." Conscience is from the Latin *con-scire* which means "to be aware together." We have individual conscience, but that personal moral compass is connected to a larger whole; we don't create it *ex nihilo*. Not only do we receive it from those who have gone before (parents, sponsors, godparents), we also have the responsibility to pass it on to those who come after us. In this way, we are part of a "common mind" which (for Christians) is the mind of Christ.

☞ As you begin and end each day this week, take a drop of water from your goblet and touch it to your forehead. Say aloud, "I am baptized into a new creation with all who have ever and will ever walk in faith." Then name aloud three or four people who have been models to you of that new creation.