

- Sermon 21 February 2021 – Lent 1 - Genesis 9:8-17, Psalm 25 v1-6, Mark 1:9-15
Lord God, help us to trust you and to keep returning to you when we stray from your ways. Amen
- Ok, I'd like you to imagine of a series of circles within circles to help illustrate where we are today.
- The big background circle is our faith in God.
- Then within it imagine a circle which contains our personal crises of the COVID-19 pandemic- severe illness, bereavement, loss of livelihood, anxiety , isolation and much more .
- Then within that, a smaller circle which is Lent - the next 6 weeks where we try to focus a little more on God through Jesus- Jesus is our Noah's ark of salvation in the midst of the rising floodwaters in our lives.
- Let's give our diagram a title: the opening verse of Psalm 25:
 - To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
 - O my God, in you I trust;
- I suggest these lines will stand us in very good stead throughout Lent, throughout the time of COVID19 and ultimately throughout our faith journeys.
- God loves us, he always has, but humans haven't lived up to our calling of being made in His image very well. God wants to help us. God wants us desperately to trust him , love Him and live in peace and harmony with the whole of his wonderful creation. And to help this happen, God, throughout the Bible has made covenants with individuals or nations and finally all who turn to His son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ through the New Covenant
- The 10 Commandments we recited at the start of the service was God's Covenant with Moses and the Israelites - the laws he gave them to live according to God's way.
- Then we heard of God's covenant with Noah in the Old Testament reading - surely the most important section of the story of Noah – we all love the fact that Noah built an ark and the animals went in two by two and all in the ark were saved while the flood destroyed the rest of life on earth ,but the telling part of the story is verse 11 where God says:
- *I will establish my covenant with you that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth*
- And God gives a sign to mark this covenant: a bow, a rainbow.
- God's bow is a weapon without the arrows - which turns it into a symbol of peace - a rainbow – rain and sun combined in a fleeting beautiful display of coloured light stretching above the earth – don't you always feel positive when you see a rainbow?
- Doesn't it make you go WOW that's so beautiful, without you realising what you are doing, surely you are lifting up your soul to the Lord?
- What symbol did people choose for their message of support, thanks and hope towards the NHS in the first lockdown: a rainbow – all colours , all inclusive, all uplifting – I wonder if they knew of the message from the bible?
- *Oh my God in you I trust*
- Surely God will act to save his beautiful creation.....Well....He **has** acted.
- He sent us Jesus,
- Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant that God has made with us- through Jesus' blood shed on the cross- - God does forgive our sins, We are healed and brought back into a right relationship with Him again if we trust and believe in Jesus, repent and take the new life he is offering through baptism and begin to enter the kingdom of God which through Jesus had started to break through into the world as we heard in our gospel reading (Mark 1v 15)
- And God is faithful and loves us– he won't try and flood the world to destroy it, but we might just do that ourselves if we're not careful.....the sea levels are rising as we speak. God has given humankind free will - that really IS love - not to control us, but to always be there to help us when

we swallow our pride and realise we need His help in our lives : to do that we have to love him in return.

- But to trust and to love you have to make yourself vulnerable ; you have to let go of some control of the situation. The COVID pandemic has shown us that we all feel scared and anxious when we can't control what's going on in our lives and that is perfectly natural and understandable. But God can give us a different dimension
- As Christians we believe that God loves us unconditionally - we don't have to earn his love, we just have to trust him and let him guide us in our lives. Isn't there enough evidence through the ages that when humans think they know best and don't let God guide them but exert power, wars happen, forests burn, the rich get richer and the poor get trampled to the back of the queue or totally abandoned in slums, refugee camps and war zones.
- If we trust God to be in the situation and manage to listen to him and respond to the prompts of the Holy Spirit, we also find hope and self worth based on loving our neighbour as well as God, we follow Jesus more closely and with him find an inner strength to face our own personal challenges of COVID19 or anything else.
- If we are in a position to reach out and help our neighbour, we do that through God's love. And if we are in a position of great need , we hopefully find help being offered to us , through others working through God's love.
- *To you O Lord I lift up my soul*
- My immediate reactions to the words "lift up" are positive and joyful and wanting to reach out to God.
- We talk about lifting our hearts to the Lord at the start of eucharistic worship , Jesus was lifted up first from death and then into heaven to sit at the right hand of God.
- It suggests looking upwards (where we instinctively seek God don't we? hands often raised up in praise and singing, perhaps a glance upward while saying a quick prayer (I've noticed sportsmen and women doing this in thanks for success) .
- Acknowledging God's grace, God's presence in what we do - letting him into our lives and seeking him again and again.
- But on the other hand the words also contain a feeling of confession - acknowledging His greater power - asking God to accept me as I am, a sinner, and let me return to him, his ways rather than my ways
 - *To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;*
 - *O my God, in you I trust;*
- Maybe Noah said these words as the floods receded , thankful and believing.
- Maybe Jesus said these words when receiving the Holy Spirit at his baptism just before the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness, or the times when he went to a quiet place to pray alone and maybe even in the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane.
- So let us keep these words in mind through everything we face this Lent and try to trust more strongly in God , and to lift up our souls to Him whether in pleas for help or of confession or to give him our grateful thanks when He provides even just a glimmer of light in the darkness.
- And believe in the good news Jesus was proclaiming - that through him the kingdom of God has come near , and play our part in extending it this Lent.
- In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
- Amen

Katrina Nice 21.2.21