

Catholic practice of making an occasion of the first communion could be thought of, say, at the beginning of each year.

Frankly I think the practice of infrequent communion in the Church of Scotland is disastrous and if children attend, this may help us see this. For at the infrequent celebration length of service and sometimes, I'm afraid, formality, replace to some measure the joy and strength of the Gospel.

But it does all hinge on Calvin's phrase and helping us all to become what in fact we are - those for whom Christ dies and rose from the dead.

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God's Covenant of Preservation : Noah

SERVICE OUTLINE ON THE THEME INDICATED IN THE
JOINT LITURGICAL GROUP'S LECTIONARY FOR THE
SEVENTH SUNDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS. (Though usable
on any general Sunday)

HYMNS FROM WHICH A SELECTION MAY BE MADE - NUMBERS REFER TO CH3

24 (Psalm 46)	God is our refuge and our strength
34	Lord of all being
71 (Psalm 61)	O God give ear unto my cry
78	Jesus, lover of my soul
80	Lord Jesus think on me
139 (Psalm 121)	I to the hills will lift mine eyes
140 (Psalm 93)	The Lord doth reign
151 (Children)	God who made the earth
153 (Children)	A little child may know
491	Lord of our life, and God of our salvation
677	O Love that wilt not let me go

Scripture Lessons:

Old Testament: Genesis 8:6-12; or Genesis 9: 8-17

Epistle: 1st Peter 3: 13-22

Gospel: St. Luke 17: 20-26

Children's Talk:

This would follow the Old Testament Lesson. A useful visual aid is the 'rainbow' edition of the Good News Bible. On the front cover is a picture of a group of

children looking up at a rainbow and on the spine a picture of a dove bearing a fresh olive leaf.

Ascertain whether any of the children possess this particular edition and point out the relevant features. Refer to the passage just read from the Bible and go over the story of Noah's ark with them. Draw particular attention to the dove and the rainbow,

Ask whether any of the children can tell you the colours of the rainbow - red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. (A useful mnemonic is the sentence 'Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain - the initial letters of each word correspond to the initial letters of each colour).

The rainbow is a lovely sight and we all love to see one. In the Bible we read that the rainbow was a sign of a promise God made never to destroy the earth again with a flood. Today when we see a rainbow it reminds us of the ancient story of Noah's ark and of God's care for his people in difficult and dangerous times.

(May I share something in a footnote? I used the above children's address a few weeks before Easter. The following Sunday the five to seven year olds were painting pictures of the Easter story, and in several crucifixion scenes there appeared a rainbow above the cross. I hesitate to draw any conclusions from this. Such a conjunction of rainbow and cross raises interesting questions regarding the theological relationship between the divine covenants. More mundanely, it was reassuring to learn (a) that the children listened and (b) that they remembered a week later.)

Sermon Outline

(1) The story of Noah is an ancient one found in the earliest chapters of Genesis which record myths and sagas from the period of pre-history. But it is more than an old story. Rather it is a dramatic parable for today, indeed especially for today when, for the first time in history the basic assumption of the story is universally credible, namely the total destruction of the earth. Substitute nuclear fall-out for rain and the story of Noah makes chilling reading indeed. The word of promise and preservation represented by the dove and the rainbow is not a romantic frill but an evangelical necessity.

(2) Water was a traditional symbol of evil for ancient people (Cf Psalms 46, 93). (This point is amplified by D.E. Nineham in his Commentary on Mark 4: 35-41; c.f. John Gunstone's Commentary on the New Lectionary Volume 2 p. 408). We can understand this when flooding meant not just inconvenience but destruction

and death. The flooding of the earth with water represents the rising tide of sin which caused God to repent of his work of creation, but yet God cannot allow all to be destroyed. He will preserve Noah and his family.

(3) The means of salvation is the ark, and in the early church the ark became a symbol of the church itself (Cf Hymn 491 v.2.) We find reference to this in 1st Peter Ch.3 where the entry of Noah and his family into the ark is seen as a prefiguring of our entry into the church through baptism. Again we can see the force of the analogy. In the early days of the church when persecution was rife the first Christians must have felt that the craft of their faith was a very frail vessel indeed, and that they had been set adrift on a rising flood of evil.

(4) To apply Noah's ark as a modern parable of the church is to say two things:

(a) it is to recognise the reality of evil in the world. There are many experiences which could be described accurately as being overwhelmed by a flood, and Christians are not exempt from these. Indeed Jesus himself, who is the pilot of our ark of faith, was one who suffered much and was rejected by the people of his own day. Indeed he once likened his experience to that of Noah who alone stood out from his times and was scorned and ridiculed by his contemporaries. Indeed the way the Bible tells us the story of Noah's ark it was plainly no luxury cruise but an experience fraught with anxiety and despair. Would it ever stop raining? The relief when the dove returns with the olive leaf is palpable.

(b) This leads to the second point which emerges when we view the ark as a parable of the church, namely that it enables us to recognise not only the reality of evil but also the reality of hope and preservation. Not that the church should ever be preoccupied with thoughts of its own preservation as such. Rather it is the means through which God offers his salvation to all people. Sometimes, it has to be said, the church has sought to preserve itself by courting worldly power and temporal influence, so much so that the image of the frail craft on the rising flood has appeared less than apt. The symbol of the ark therefore recalls the church to its essential nature, and reminds us that our hope is not in our own works or cleverness but in God's promise. The ark also reminds us that with God death and destruction are never the last words, for beyond the flood is the dove with its message of hope and the rainbow as the sign of God's faithfulness.

'Lord Jesus think on me,
That when the flood is past
I may the eternal brightness see,
And share thy joy at last. (HYMN 80 verse 6)

Prayers

The following prayers may be incorporated with the minister's own material

- (1) May the strength of God pilot us.

May the power of God preserve us.

May the wisdom of God instruct us.

May the hand of God protect us.

May the way of God direct us.

May the shield of God defend us.

May the host of God guard us against the snares of evil and the temptations of the world.

May Christ be with us, Christ before us, Christ in us, Christ over us.

May thy salvation, O Lord, be always ours this day and for ever more.

(St. Patrick's Breastplate.)

- (2) Grant us, O Lord our God, ever to find in thee a very present help in trouble. When we are in the darkness of doubt or perplexity, shed thy light upon our way. When we are burdened with the affairs of our daily life, lift us to the calm of thy presence.

When we are battling with temptation and the flesh is weak, by the might of the Spirit make us strong to overcome.

We ask these things through him in whom we are more than conquerors, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Frank Colquhoun)

- (3) We pray for all who are passing through days of trouble and distress; for those who through anxiety and depression feel their spirits overwhelmed as by a flood; surround them, we pray, with kind and caring people and speak to them words of hope and reassurance that they may learn again to see the signs of hope and to trust in your promises which never fail; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(F.A.J.M.)

- (4) Blessed are all thy saints, O God and King, who have travelled over the tempestuous sea of this life and have made the harbour of peace and felicity. Watch over us who are still on dangerous voyage. Frail is our vessel, and the ocean is wide; but as in thy mercy thou hast set our course, so pilot the vessel of our life towards the everlasting shore of peace, and bring us at last to the quiet haven of our heart's desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(St. Augustine)

ANTHEMS

If an anthem is to be sung one of the following would be suitable:

The Church Anthem Book

No. 4 Almighty and Everlasting God

Gibbons

No. 29 Hear Lord, Make haste to help us

Tchaikovsky

No. 69 O Lord my God to thee

Arcadelt

The Oxford Easy Anthem Book

No. 33 O Lord, I will praise thee

Gordon Jacob

No. 34 All from the sun's uprise

Philip Tomblings

FINLAY A.J. MACDONALD. Jordanhill,
Glasgow.

THE WORSHIP BOOKS

THE WORSHIP BOOKS

Now 25 years on in my ministry, I have responded to the Editor's invitation to talk about books by looking at the shelf that sits beside my desk, where my most used books are kept, and by trying to assess what devotional and liturgical books have been most valuable to me and, I hope my congregations in our worship Sunday by Sunday.

Beside the Bibles, Hymn Book and Concordance are ranged the three Books of Common Order, each the cause of controversy and opprobrium when it was issued. I have come to respect these books and their compilers, because they give to worship a dimension both of time and tradition, and of the world-wide communion of saints. I have devised my own forms of service for sacraments and ordinances, but these are not always appropriate, and I am diffident about subjecting my congregation to my own personal liturgical prejudices, formal or informal. That is why there are a number of other books which sometimes I use directly, but more often draw upon to take me out of a devotional or linguistic rut. Perhaps a prayer, a phrase even, will stimulate a new line of thought which may be helpful to the congregation. These books are also useful when we invite our various organisations to help plan an act of worship. They provide suitable material, and arouse discussion about worship, which is always valuable. If people begin to care about worship and know about it, this will promote effective Christian education and spiritual development. Above all it can help people to be devotionally articulate.

I suppose that the great shift in worship over the last 25 years has been the move away from Authorised Version language. I don't just mean from the cadences and familiar phrases which were adopted in the formulation of prayer. I mean from the symbols and allusions that could be assumed to 'ring bells' in the worshippers, and not need any development or explanation. Sad to say, one cannot now assume that many folk who come to Church services, especially special