

The high price of utility bills continues to scare people. It's not just a financial fear, although that's very real. We've had people ask for help because they have to choose between paying a gas bill and paying a child's medical bill. When utilities cost more, almost every household has to change some habits to pay for them. So the financial fear is real, but there's another fear. The fear of trust; the fear that people who should be providing for us may not care as much as we thought. We place our trust in certain corporations, institutions, and individual people because it appears they're here to help us. But sometimes what should be helping us is actually hurting us. We face not just financial stress, but a feeling of betrayal from the sources that should be protecting us. Maybe the church has disillusioned you. Maybe it's your spouse, your parents, your child, or your employer. You thought you could rely on their help, but now you fear they'll hurt.

The first Sunday of Lent offers a couple of readings to give hope in the midst of the life's struggles. We don't often hear about Noah on Sundays, but he appears today both in the reading from Genesis and in the first letter of Peter. You know the story. The people sinned, so God sent a flood to cover the earth, but Noah had built an ark at God's command, and he and his family were saved. Noah's situation actually reversed the kind of fear we face. We're afraid that what should help will hurt. Noah discovered that what should hurt will help. The very flood which destroyed the earth carried him away to safety. The first letter of Peter compares Noah's experience to baptism. The floodwaters of baptism destroy what is evil and carry us away to salvation. Water, the instrument of destruction, becomes an instrument of safety in God's hands. One reason many baptismal fonts have eight sides, including the one going into our new church, is because of today's reading, which notes that eight people were saved on Noah's ark.

The lesson of Noah is that we have more help than we realize. Our baptism has already rescued us from anything that could harm us, from anything. Not cold, not poverty, not sickness, nothing can keep us from union with Christ--which is all we need. God's ever-present love for us constantly gives us hope. The helplessness we feel in times of betrayal is like dogpaddling in a flood. But if that helplessness causes us to look for new solutions, maybe what we think will hurt could actually help. The people of St. Regis support one another in many ways: the food pantry, emergency funds, counseling services, Stephen ministers, the letters we send our legislators, the love we share for one another, the leads we know for jobs. A good parish is an ark afloat on the floodwaters of life. What looks like hurt could actually help when we avail ourselves of the hands of God.