

## WEEKLY STUDY GUIDE FOR WEEK BEGINNING MARCH 22<sup>nd</sup>

**THEME:** BAPTISM BECOMES REAL WHEN WE SURRENDER ALL.

**SCRIPTURE:** Mark 12.28-44

**READ:** Ramshaw, pages 33-37

Words Around the Fire, Gail Ramshaw, Pueblo Publishing Company, New York, New York, 1988.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The third part of the Easter Vigil focuses entirely on Baptism. Gathered around the font and the Easter Candle, we are reminded that water plays a central role in our redemption. The key story, of course, is the Flood and the Ark. In some churches the baptism font stands at the entrance to the sanctuary, usually called the nave, which is taken from the Latin word for 'ship'. The custom is to dip a finger in the water of the font and make the sign of the cross on your forehead or your chest.

In churches, especially with Scandinavian heritage, a ship is hung in the nave to emphasize the symbol. The ship is facing the altar, which is our heavenly destination. We are safe in the Ark, we are secure in the city, despite evidence to the contrary.

We follow the baptismal rite with a few added rituals as an affirmation of our own baptism. We all participate in this affirmation. We renounce evil and all that would take us away from God. We confess our faith. The Easter Candle is dipped in the font to connect Jesus, the Light of the World to all who are marked with the font's water.

And when we make our profession of faith, the pastor sprinkles water on the Assembly to further emphasize that we all participate in Christ's death and resurrection.

The Gospel text gives us one lesson from Jesus, one warning, and one observation. **The lesson** describes the two pillars of our faith: Love of God with all our being and Love of neighbor. These two pillars of faith call us to surrender all of who we are and all that we have to God and God's presence in the world. **The warning** is not to be fooled by those who claim to be faithful but who act contrary to the principle of loving surrender. And **the observation** involves the poor widow who gives all she has in her offering in contrast to those who give out of their abundance.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do we use water in our lives and how important is it for the preservation of life?
2. In the midst of the current health crisis in our country, where are you finding hope and encouragement?

### APPLICATIONS

1. Here is a simple exercise: On five index cards write one of the most important people or things in your life. Then take one away, and then another, and then another, until you have one last card left. How hard was it to take each card away? Can you surrender all to God?
2. Can you ask the worship committee (or pastor) to include the following in the worship calendar of the congregation: A Blessing of Expectancy, A Renewal of Marriage Vows (or Couple Commitment), A special recognition and celebration of all members over 85 years of age, A recognition of baptismal anniversaries.

### PRAYER

Wash me in the waters of Noah's cleansing flood. Give me a willing spirit, a heart both clean and good. Amen. (ELW #613)