“Baptism is not a magical deliverance from individual sin but is a constant invitation to be reborn into the new social life of God’s Kingdom centered on the Forgiving Victim who, like the bronze serpent, was raised up to draw all people to himself. In the Paschal Mystery, we die to one way of relating (or misrelating) with people in order to live to a new way of relating to others.” This is a quote from Andrew Mars, the abbot of St. Gregory’s monastery, a place that I have traditionally gone for retreat times. The image of baptism in the readings today are very powerful. The vision of water washing us clean of our sins is beautiful. As many of you know I am strongly drawn to water and love to kayak and swim and just be near the water hearing the waves lap against the shore. The rhythmic motion of the water has a cleansing effect not just on my body but on my soul. I think most of you can relate and many of you live on local lakes in and around Brown County. Baptism is one of the sacraments that is for everyone. It is the acknowledgement that each child, each person is God’s creation and begins and ends in God’s presence. It should open our eyes to God’s presence and how God is working in our daily lives. In the Old Testament the waters are of mythic proportions. They wipe out almost everything in creation. This story is one that circulated since very early humans roamed the earth. What elements contain truth I cannot say with certainty. I can say that throughout human history humanity has often brought on calamitous actions to its fellow brethren. Humanity has a history of violence against one another that our readings counter- balance with God’s salvific power and desire to be with us. In fact God promises to be with us always. The generosity of God to reach out to all humanity is in direct contradiction to humanities greed, violence and tendency to exclude those that are different. Humanities tendency is to create differences where there are in fact few to be found between peoples even of different colors, cultures, geographical locations, sexualities, genders. Humanity has often created myths that separate and ostracize rather than unite and draw each other close. We have yet to believe that this beloved human creation can really ALL fall under that rainbow that God has placed before us to symbolize God’s acceptance of all peoples. We have talked many times this past year about the divisions between Republicans and Democrats. This past week Rush Limbaugh died and while some thought that his views were satirical they are views which have wreaked great division in this world. According to a blog writer I sometimes read named Heather Cox Richardson: “It was Limbaugh who popularized the idea that hardworking white men were under attack in America. According to him, minorities and feminists were too lazy to work, and instead expected a handout from the government, paid for by tax dollars levied from hardworking white men. This, he explained, was “socialism,” and it was destroying America.” As many know, Limbaugh also used to celebrate the deaths of homosexuals who died from HIV. He was truly a man who fueled violence and hatred which is visible in our political world today. I’m not trying to condemn a dead man, but I do think this illustrates the violence we find in some of the Old Testament readings where destruction and ostracism seem to reign. Throughout history the world has faced destruction of sometimes entire populations and ethnic groups, often at the hands of other groups who think they are justified in their actions. We can see history repeat itself time and time again. Sometimes the conflict is religious in nature like the inquisition or the massacre of the Jewish people in the holocaust. Sometimes it’s ethnic like the Hutus massacring the Tutsies. Sometimes it’s caused by human greed over care of climate and our most vulnerable citizens. Not caring for our climate is causing weather events that we are just not prepared for like the one in Texas this past week. These events our literally killing humans and animals alike. These readings today are telling us that the waters of baptism and the living water of God demands a different approach from humanity. God is a God of promise and hope, a loving God, a salvific God. God promises never to destroy this earth with a flood again and who continues to be with us and save us even as the violence against each other and the climate continues. God does not give up on trying to find ways to bring us closer to her. God shows us that through the help of a savior who resisted all temptations we too can live according to God’s ways. We too can turn back around and repent of the errors of our communities and of our sins as individuals and create a new path forward. Heather Cox Richardson reminds us of the power of one man spreading a lie over years of radio broadcasts. She reminds us that this lie should not dictate our lives and we can change the false narratives in this world to reflect a new way of living, a baptism into the living waters of Jesus Christ. It takes a lot of work to change this broken community. It takes a lot of healing to repair the breach of mistrust and misinformation. But we have a God who accompanies us without fail and promises that she will never give up on us and she will include everyone in the new narrative, the new human family that encompasses all. Lent is a holy time, a time of confronting the deep issues that run through the shared experiences of humanity. A time to remind one another that we can create a new narrative, one that reflects God’s goodness and love to the whole of creation.