

Second Sunday of Lent, February 28, 2021

Greeting: God is good **all the time**. All the time **God is good**.

Question of the Day:

What might not be a spiritual discipline? a) prayer b) worship c) fasting d) shopping

Call to Worship

Jesus Christ bore the cross for our salvation.

He was raised from the dead for the redemption of the world.

During our worship may God grant us the courage to take up our cross and follow Jesus,

that through his grace we may accept the cost of faithful discipleship

and receive the joy of everlasting life with Christ,

who lives with us and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Prayer of Invocation

Holy God, may your Spirit open our hearts to receive your Word, and reveal to us the good news, so we may trust in the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn “Lord, I Need You”

Genesis 17:1-16 *New Revised Standard Version*

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.”

God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Mark 8:31-38 *New Revised Standard Version*

Then [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But

turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Romans 4:9-25 *The Message*

Do you think for a minute that this blessing is only pronounced over those of us who keep our religious ways and are circumcised? Or do you think it possible that the blessing could be given to those who never even heard of our ways, who were never brought up in the disciplines of God? We all agree, don't we, that it was by embracing what God did for him that Abraham was declared fit before God?

Now *think*. Was that declaration made before or after he was marked by the covenant of circumcision? That's right, *before* he was marked. That means that he underwent circumcision as evidence and confirmation of what God had done long before to bring him into this acceptable standing with himself, an act of God he had embraced with his whole life.

And it means further that Abraham is father of *all* people who embrace what God does for them while they are still on the “outs” with God, as yet unidentified as God's, in an “uncircumcised” condition. It is precisely these people in this condition who are called “set right by God and with God”! Abraham is also, of course, father of those who have undergone the religious rite of circumcision *not* just because of the ritual but because they were willing to live in the risky faith-embrace of God's action for them, the way Abraham lived long before he was marked by circumcision.

That famous promise God gave Abraham – that he and his children would possess the earth – was not given because of something Abraham did or would do. It was based on God's decision to put everything together for him, which Abraham then entered when he believed. If those who get what God gives them only get it by doing everything they are told to do and filling out all the right forms properly signed, that eliminates personal trust completely and turns the promise into an ironclad *contract*! That's not a holy promise; that's a business deal. A contract drawn up by a hard-nosed lawyer and with plenty of fine print only makes sure that you will never be able to collect. But if there is no contract in the first place, simply a *promise* – and God's promise at that – you can't break it.

This is why the fulfillment of God's promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way, and then simply embracing him and what he does. God's promise arrives as pure gift. That's the only way everyone can be sure to get in on it, those who keep the religious traditions *and* those who have never heard of them. For Abraham is father of us all. He is not our racial father – that's reading the story backwards. He is our *faith* father.

We call Abraham “father” not because he got God's attention by living like a saint, but because God made something out of Abraham when he was a nobody. Isn't that what we've always read in Scripture, God saying to Abraham, “I set you up as father of many peoples”? Abraham was first named “father” and then *became* a father because he dared to trust God to do what only God could do: raise the dead to life, with a word make something out of nothing. When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he *couldn't* do but what God said he *would* do. And so he was made father of a multitude of peoples. God himself said to him, “You're going to have a big family, Abraham!”

Abraham didn't focus on his own impotence and say, "It's hopeless. This hundred-year-old body could never father a child." Nor did he survey Sarah's decades of infertility and give up. He didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what he had said. That's why it is said, "Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right." But it's not just Abraham; it's also us! The same thing gets said about us when we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally hopeless. The sacrificed Jesus made us fit for God, set us *right with God*.

Response: *The Word of God, for the people of God! Thanks be to God!*

Time of Prayer

How Is It With Your Soul?

Call to Confession

Trusting in God's promise of salvation, let us confess our sin and repent.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess that we have not been sincere Christians.

We claim to follow Jesus but have not taken his path of sacrificial love.

We profess to be disciples, but we are not willing to bear the cost of discipleship.

We affirm the virtue of self-denial, but we indulge our selfish desires and seek earthly gain.

Forgive us, we pray. Free us for sincere repentance through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

(Time of Silent Prayer)

Hear the good news: God forgives us. With thankful hearts we join Jesus in praying:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Answer to the Question of the Day:

Time of Offering *Thank you to everyone for your faithful generosity.*

Offering Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for the covenant you established with Abraham and Sarah, which you have opened to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Accept these offerings with the dedication of our lives, that we may be for the world a sign of your abiding love and a testament to your enduring promise. In Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory are yours, Almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

Sermon "The Profit of Faith" Rev. Joyce Rich

Commission and Blessing

Disciples of Jesus, do not shun the way of the cross, but follow wherever our Lord may lead.

May the blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, uphold us on the way.

Amen. And Amen.

Hymn "Do Lord"

Announcements; Next Week: Exodus 20:1-17; John 2:13-22; I Corinthians 1:18-25

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