

Sunday, March 13, 2022
Second Sunday of Lent
Reflections by Juel Pierce

First Reading

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

God promises a childless and doubting Abram that he will have a child, that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars, and that the land of Canaan will be their inheritance. Abram's trust in God is sealed with a covenant-making ceremony, a sign of God's promise.

¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ²But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." ⁴But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." ⁵He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

⁷Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." ⁸But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹²As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram,

and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

¹⁷When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.”

Text Questions

What was God’s promise to Abram? (verse 1) What do you think God meant by promising Abram a great reward? (See Genesis 12:1-3) This is the same question that Abram asked of God. (verse 2) What made Abram question this? (verse 3) What was God’s response to this question? (verses 4-5) What was Abram’s response? (verse 6) God says that this declaration of belief is what makes Abram “righteous,” that is, in right relationship to God. What do you mean when you say that you believe in God? Is this an ethical statement? Or a statement of identity and relationship? —Sort of like, I am friends with such a person, or I am such a person’s spouse. In other words, does what you do come first (ethics) or who you are (identity and relationship)? God then proceeds to state God’s relationship with Abram. (verse 7) Then God commands Abram to perform a ritual of that relationship. (verses 8-11) What does Abram then do? (verse 12) As he sleeps, what does God do? (verses 17-18) Is it Abram’s sacrifice, or God’s action that establishes and confirms the relationship? When we offer something to God, does our offering establish our relationship with God, or do we offer to God out of our belief in our relationship with God?

Psalm 27

In the day of trouble, God will give me shelter. (Ps. 27:5)

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

²**When evildoers close in against me to devour my flesh, they, my foes and my enemies, will stumble and fall.**

³Though an army encamp against me, my heart will not fear.
Though war rise up against me, my trust will not be shaken.

⁴**One thing I ask of the LORD; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life; to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek God in the temple.**

⁵For in the day of trouble God will give me shelter,
hide me in the hidden places of the sanctuary, and raise me high upon a rock.

⁶**Even now my head is lifted up above my enemies who surround me.**

Therefore I will offer sacrifice in the sanctuary, sacrifices of rejoicing; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

⁷Hear my voice, O LORD, when I call;
have mercy on me and answer me.

⁸**My heart speaks your message— “Seek my face.”
Your face, O LORD, I will seek.**

⁹Hide not your face from me, turn not away from your servant in anger.

Cast me not away—you have been my helper; forsake me not, O God of my salvation.

¹⁰**Though my father and my mother forsake me, the LORD will take me in.**

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD;
lead me on a level path, because of my oppressors.

¹²**Subject me not to the will of my foes, for they rise up against me, false witnesses breathing violence.**

¹³This I believe—that I will see the goodness of the LORD

in the land of the living!

¹⁴Wait for the LORD and be strong.

Take heart and wait for the LORD!

Text Questions

When we say we believe in God, what are we saying? (verse 1) What does it mean to you that God is “my light and my salvation”? The psalmist declares that because God is their light and their salvation, there is nothing to be afraid of. What does the psalmist say will happen to their enemies? (verses 2-3) Why does the psalmist ask God that they may dwell in God’s house? (verse 4) Where is God’s house if we dwell in it all of our lives? Does that mean that we will never see trouble? (verse 5) What is the sacrifice the psalmist will offer to God? (verse 6) The psalmist describes what they can count on because of their relationship to God. What is it? (verses 7-9) What is the psalmist’s most important relationship? (verse 10) What is God’s way for the psalmist? (verse 11) From whom will God protect us? (verse 12) When things go wrong, what can we count on, according to the psalmist? (verse 13) What do you think it means to “wait for YHWH?” (verse 14)

Second Reading

Philippians 3:17--4:1

Although Paul’s devotion to Christ has caused him to be persecuted, he does not regret the course he has taken. Writing from prison, he expresses confidence in a glorious future and encourages other Christians to follow in his footsteps.

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them,

and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. ^{4:1}Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Text Questions

What does Paul instruct the Christians in Philippi to do? (verse 17) Can you think of Christians who you want to observe how they live and imitate them? I can think of people, some of whom have died and some of whom are famous, and many of whom are in our congregation. Who does Paul warn them against? (verse 18) Do you know anyone (or have heard of anyone) who is an enemy of the cross of Christ? How does Paul describe these people? (verse 19) What does it mean, do you think, to have your mind set on earthly things? Paul, as you may know, was a Roman citizen—which was not true of everyone. And yet, even though Roman citizenship was highly prized, what counted more for Paul? (verse 20) How do we have citizenship in heaven? (verse 21) What does Paul urge us to do, as his sisters and brothers, along with those in Philippi. What do you think it means to be a citizen of heaven? How does being a citizen of heaven affect our allegiance to earthly powers?

Gospel

Luke 13:31-35

Neither Herod's plotting nor Jerusalem's resistance to maternal love will deter Jesus from his sacrificial mission.

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to [Jesus,] “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³²He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Text Questions

What did “some Pharisees” tell Jesus? (verse 31) Note that these Pharisees were not hypocritical opponents of Jesus. Remember that Jesus had reason to fear Herod, who had imprisoned and killed his cousin, John the Baptist. (See Luke 3:19-20) What does Jesus say his plan and mission is for “today and tomorrow,” regardless of Herod’s threats? (verse 32) What will he do on “the third day”? What do you think of when you hear/read Jesus’ words about today, tomorrow, and the third day? Where is he going? (verse 33) Why is he going to Jerusalem? How does Jesus describe Jerusalem? (verse 34) How does Jesus wish he could mother Jerusalem? Why can’t he? Another translation of verse 35a is this: “So take note: your house will be left to you desolate.” Why will it be desolate? Who will be gone from it? When will they next see Jesus? When will that be? (see Luke 19:37-38) Again, in Luke 19:39, some Pharisees want to keep Jesus from provoking the authorities. What will happen in Jerusalem after that? How will this gospel help us to prepare to be filled to the brim? Will it be easy for us? Why or why not?