

LENT 2

Year B

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Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

17 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. ² And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous.” ³ Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵ 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. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ 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.

¹⁵ God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her and also give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Commentary from Simon Dinglasan

The one thing Abram has wanted since receiving the promise from God that he would be the father of many nations is an heir, but things are starting to look bleak on that front. At first, without children of his own, Abram thinks his slave Eliezer, who oversaw his household, might end up being the heir. But God tells him that his heir will be his biological son. Abram and Sarai then decide to help God along with that plan, and they have Sarai’s slave, Hagar, conceive and bear a son with Abram. But Hagar takes her son and runs away because of Sarai’s resentment. And that brings us to our text today. In the wake of these stumbling and failed ways – Abram has tried to finesse the promise so that it makes sense given his and Sarai’s ages – God shows up and demonstrates God’s faithfulness by renewing the promise and then inviting Abram and Sarai anew to trust in God’s ability to provide.

Discussion Questions

Have you brought something to God in prayer that you really wanted? How did God respond to you?

How do you live your faithfulness to God? How are you sustained in that faithfulness?

Psalm 22:22-30

- ²² Praise the LORD, you that fear him; *
stand in awe of him, O offspring of
Israel;
all you of Jacob's line, give glory.
- ²³ For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in
their poverty;
neither does he hide his face from them;
*
but when they cry to him he hears them.
- ²⁴ My praise is of him in the great assembly; *
I will perform my vows in the presence
of those who worship him.
- ²⁵ The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
and those who seek the LORD shall
praise him: *
"May your heart live for ever!"
- ²⁶ All the ends of the earth shall remember and
turn to the LORD, *
and all the families of the nations shall
bow before him.
- ²⁷ For kingship belongs to the LORD; *
he rules over the nations.
- ²⁸ To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow
down in worship; *
all who go down to the dust fall before
him.
- ²⁹ My soul shall live for him;
my descendants shall serve him; *
they shall be known as the LORD's for
ever.
- ³⁰ They shall come and make known to a people
yet unborn *
the saving deeds that he has done.

Commentary from Simon Dinglasan

The verses from Psalm 22 appointed for today come after the psalmist has spent the first 21 verses crying out to God in despair and pleading for deliverance. The psalmist can do this because they recall that the Holy One has always been faithful, delivering their ancestors when, in trust, they also cried out in despair. It is by recalling God's faithfulness in the past that we can now join our voices with the great multitude through all time who cry out in praise of God's saving deeds – those who fear God; those who worship God; those who seek God; all the families of the nations; all those who sleep in the earth; and all our descendants yet to be born.

Discussion Questions

Can you recall moments in your personal history where God may have been at work responding to your need?

What does praising God look like as you walk through your day-to-day activities?

Romans 4:13-25

¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

¹⁶ For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So shall your descendants be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² Therefore “it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” ²³ Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Commentary from Simon Dinglasan

Our text from Romans offers us something of a Christological exegesis of today’s reading from Genesis. God’s promise to Abraham was an invitation into a loving relationship based on faith. God offered Abraham a vision of his place in history and promised to provide the means to achieve it – an heir. Abraham’s attempts to make that promise come true before he and Sarah were too old to have children, however, represent our need to wrangle matters of faith into logical systems of progression (i.e., laws).

Such a wrangling may seem to secure the promise, but if Abraham had succeeded it would have precluded the action of grace that guarantees the fulfillment of the promise to all his descendants regardless of one’s ability to abide by the law. Abraham has (and therefore we have) been saved from that fate by God’s faithfulness that inspired the same in him. Faith is a divine gift that comes despite external evidence to the contrary. We Christians renew that gift of faith today not by anything we do nor by following any laws that might make us worthy, but by professing our belief in God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Discussion Questions

Have you ever found it hard to stay true to your faith? What helps strengthen your faith?

How have you experienced God’s grace and blessing in your life?

Mark 8:31-38

³¹Then he 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. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But 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.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For 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. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those 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.”

Commentary from Simon Dinglasan

A fundamental aspect of the Christian life is that in small and sometimes big ways it will always include rejection and suffering. The preaching of a gospel of love that seeks to restore all people to unity with God and each other will (must?) bring you into conflict with the powers that be who maintain control by sowing division. On a personal level, opening yourself up to love another more deeply requires that you let go of any idea of a stable and secure existence in favor of the unpredictability and profound joy of an authentic, vulnerable human relationship. When we follow Jesus, in small or large ways we will suffer, though never for the sake of suffering but always in service of God’s healing and reconciling love.

Discussion Questions

If it is your practice to fast during Lent, how does your fast this year open you up to love more profoundly?

Are there perspectives you hold that give you a sense of security or stability that you might reconsider?

In the context of great challenges today like climate change or prolonged and deadly military conflicts, how might “taking up your cross” look now?