

Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for February 25, 2018
Second Sunday of Lent



THE READINGS

First Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

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 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.”

Worth Noting: After a few decades of God’s leading him around the Middle East, Abram seems ready to settle down and wants an answer: Is it too late for my wife and I to have children? God gives an emphatic no. Are there things you wish to do that you think no longer possible? How can you be so sure?

Psalm 22:23-31

²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

²⁴ For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.

- ²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
- ²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live forever!
- ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
- ²⁸ For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.
- ²⁹ To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.
- ³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
- ³¹ and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

Worth Noting: Psalm 22:23-31 constitutes the psalmist's joyful proclamation of the faithfulness of the LORD. The joy of this proclamation spreads in widening circles – from the LORD's followers (verses 23- 25) to all nations (verse 27) to the dead (verse 29) and finally to those yet unborn (verse 31). (Verse 22, not included, concerns the nuclear family and local congregation.) How does your community proclaim God? Is it with joy or with deep concern or . . . ?

Second Reading: Romans 4:13-25

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 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 violation. ¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he 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 numerous 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), or when he considered 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 his faith "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 to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Worth Noting: Paul's first point is that Abram/ Abraham received the promise of descendants (Genesis 17) centuries before Moses received the Law at Mt. Sinai. Jesus fulfills the promise that Abraham will be the father of many nations when his actions bring those nations who did not accept the Law – the Gentiles – into the family of Abraham. How do you and your community recognize this kinship among Abraham and modern-day Jews and Christians?

Gospel: Mark 8:31-38 *Alternative: Mark 9:2-9*

³¹ Then he [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. ³² He said all this quite openly.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ 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.”

³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ 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.”

Worth Noting: Whoooooaaaaaaa! That is so harsh! Satan? Really? It's easy to focus on the dialogue between Peter and Jesus (but see Entering into the Scriptures below). Maybe it's the last paragraph, though, that is really harsh. What does it mean to you to take up your cross? Isn't the cross a means of execution, of death? And didn't Jesus come to bring abundant life? Is it only eternal life that Jesus promises? Could earthly life carrying a cross be more abundant? Or will life happen anyway, and is it Christ who makes it abundant and joyful?

CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Entering into the Scriptures

It's almost automatic when we hear Jesus call Peter “Satan” (Greek *satanas*), to picture a red-suited, pitchfork carrying imp, dragging us into a burning pit. The term, however, has a more ambiguous history in the Bible.

The Greek word transliterates the Hebrew *satan*, an Old Testament reference to an opponent or adversary. Much of the time *satan* was a human adversary or opponent. After Solomon took multiple foreign wives, the LORD raised up adversaries, *satans*, against him (1 Kings 11:14, 23, 25). In Job, and elsewhere, however, “the satan” (*basatan*) served in the divine household, charged with being the eyes and ears of the LORD and testing humans' true righteousness. The Old Testament figure is always subordinate to the LORD.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke describe Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness to establish an earthly kingdom. Peter, who has acknowledged Jesus as Messiah (Mark 8:29), surely looked forward to a time when Jesus reigned as the Messiah-king of Israel, presenting

this same temptation to forego the hard slog of daily ministry, with Golgotha at the end, and instead pursue the goal of establishing himself as king of Israel.

We can assume that Peter's response came from love of Jesus, as a parent counsels her teenager on substance abuse. There is love, but also a sense of loss of the prosperous future foreseen when Jesus was curing lepers and restoring sight to the blind. The future Jesus laid out was likely to result in the apostles scorned for following a crucified one. Hence Jesus' saying on shame: If you are ashamed of me now, I will be ashamed of you.

“Stay by My Side”

When first heard, Jesus' words about mutual shame may be consoling: When have I ever been ashamed of Jesus and of his words (Mark 1:38)? Surely, I can beat that one.

I imagine Jesus might be comparing us to middle-school children who want nothing more than to be anonymous when shopping in the mall with their parents: Walk ahead; walk behind; never look at them. Somewhere inside, these children really do love their parents, but (a) “They are so old and (worse) old-fashioned and (worst of all) so poorly dressed” and (b) “I've told all my friends how independent I am; how mortifying to be seen shopping with my parents” (who known nothing about clothes anyway).

In my life have I ignored Jesus when he's walking beside me? Maybe when I'm hanging out with acquaintances from work or the neighborhood? I know that Christ is to be found in the marginalized, but how often am I ashamed to acknowledge Christ in the dispossessed, homeless, addicted? A perennial or at least biennial question: How do I vote? My vote expresses my priorities and my friendships: have I spent time aligning my values with Christ's or have I ignored him there too?

Questions for Discussion

Abraham displayed his faith through his obedience to God's will – traveling to the promised land, caring for the stranger – and in his trust in God's mercy, when he advocated for the people of Sodom. How would you define Christian faith and its works?

Can you recall a time when though you were “ashamed” of your values, you expressed them? What was the reaction?

Jesus remained faithful to his ministry, ignoring the chidings of Peter and his own family (Mark 3:21, 31). Have you had an experience of ignoring well-intentioned words of advice against pursuing what you believed to be your true call? Was that an easy time for you?



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