

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent March 13, 2022 Year A

Previously in the story of Abraham, (known as Abram)) God had called him to leave his home and go to a land that God will show. At that same time God says he will make Abram a great nation. God promises to make him a blessing and his name will be great. So Abram followed God's instructions and took his nephew Lot with him to the land of Canaan. While living in Canaan as an alien, Abram had a conflict with local kings and had to rescue Lot from them.

After this God spoke to Abram in a vision and expanded on his promises. God says "do not be afraid, I am your shield, your reward will be very great". Abram asked how this could be since God has not given him an heir. God countered by saying that he will have his own son who will be his heir. Moreover God showed him the stars and told him that is how numerous his descendants will be.

Notice that Abram believes in God's promise without having any evidence that it will actually come to pass. It must be that Abram believes that God is capable of making this happen. How can that be? Because God has responded to his particular need. God has linked the promise to a specific situation. God initiates Abram's faith. Abrams belief is reckoned to him as righteousness. According to Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, Abraham thus became the father of all who have faith.

The ritual sacrifice of animals cut in two has both Abram and God as participants. Abram prepares and protects the sacrifice and God confirms his intention by passing through the midst of them. God then makes a covenant with Abram giving his descendants the land from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates. The Interpreters' Bible says, "The covenant means a promise under oath, solemnly sworn, not an agreement or contract". God unilaterally declares and swears to it at his own initiative.

Abram will not live to see God's fulfillment concerning the land. It will be 400 years before it comes to pass. His descendants will have to endure slavery in Egypt before they possess the land. Maybe this text can teach us to live with delay.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul encourages them to imitate him and live according to the example they have seen in him. At first glance this statement sounds prideful and conceited.

We need to be aware that these brothers and sisters were recently pagans and had no experience of Christianity. They had to see it to believe it.

Actually, this lesson is for me and you as well. If we claim to be Christians, people should expect to encounter Jesus in our words and actions. My priorities and security should be in my relationship with Jesus, not in material things or political power.

Paul writes about people who are enemies of the cross of Christ. He tells us to avoid them. Who are these people? Barclay says they were probably Gnostics of various kinds. They distorted the Christian principals of liberty and grace to justify their sins. Their reference point was in themselves.

Paul tells us that our citizenship is in Heaven. I think he has in mind that people in any Roman colonial city thought of themselves as being Roman citizens and identified with Rome. So if we are citizens of Heaven, we should become outposts of the Kingdom of God in the world. May it be so.

The Gospel of Luke is kinder to the Pharisees than the other Gospels. In Matthew, Mark and John they are portrayed as being opposed to Jesus, particularly about Sabbath regulations and social piety. They try to trap him in his words so that can bring charges against him. They clearly don't believe that God has sent him. In fact, they consider him a dangerous influence and want to destroy him.

But notice, Jesus did not criticize them for strictly keeping the Law and urging others to do so. He criticized them for majoring the details and neglecting the principles of the Law. Over the years the Law had accrued many interpretations and rules that were supposed to flesh out the bare bones of the Ten Commandments. What happened was the rules became all important. Thus we see Jesus challenging the Pharisees about divorce, healing on the Sabbath (it is work which is forbidden on the Sabbath) and eating and socializing with sinners.

But in the chapter of Luke, the Pharisees are warning Jesus of Herod's intention to kill him. Could it be that some Pharisees believed in Jesus secretly? I am thinking Nicodemus who came by night and Joseph of Arimathea. The most important statement Jesus makes in this chapter is his response to their warning.

Jesus is not afraid of Herod so he doesn't flee to safety. He is determined to complete God's plan for his life and it must take place in Jerusalem. He says, "Go and tell that fox, look you, I cast out demons and I work cures today and on the third day my work is perfected". He is predicting his silvic death in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem has often been hostile to the prophets – think of Jeremiah. Jesus also predicts the destruction of Jerusalem because she did not recognize the time of her visitation by God. Jesus compares himself to a mother hen who offers them protection under her wings. Jerusalem will reject his offer. There will be dire consequences.

And what of us? Do we criticize others but ignore our own sins? Do we do things in order to gain others approval? Are we more interested in appearing holy than in being holy? I think we should be a little kinder to the Pharisees. It is too easy to become like them.

