

Bible Tuesday for Lent II, 2019

Genesis 15:1-18

After 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."

But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But 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." He 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." And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord God how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He 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." He 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. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On 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,

Back in chapter 12 of Genesis, God spoke to Abraham and made a covenant with him promising an heir, land, and that all of the peoples of the world would be blessed through Abraham. However, none of that has come to pass yet and Abraham and Sarah are 10 years older now.

Again God speaks to Abraham and confirms this covenant. "And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." "Righteousness" means being right with God, there being no conflict or sin between the person and God. Because Abraham believes God's promise, he is stated to be right with God. No sacrifice, offering, or acts of contrition necessary. Merely faith in what God said. Note that this faith was not without question. "How am I to know..." God answers Abraham with a ritual that predates Israel.

A little gully is required for this ritual. The prescribed animals are cut in half from nose to tail. Exactly how one works around the skull and bones I do not know. The animals are laid out in this manner: half of each animal is laid on one side of the little gully and its other half is laid opposite it so that the animals' blood runs down into the bottom of the gully. One side of the little gully is God's side and one side is Abraham's side. They are the two partners bound together in this covenant who are now to function as one. Abraham is to be completely obedient and faithful to God and God will give and heir whose offspring will number more than the stars in heaven, land, and blessing to all people through Abraham. The covenant is signed by both parties walking between the animal halves, at the bottom of the gully, through the blood.

Abraham has a couple problems with this. 1) How is God going to walk through the blood? 2) If Abraham is unfaithful to the covenant, God may cut in half stem to stern just as these animals are. How can Abraham possibly be perfectly obedient and faithful to God? As he cannot, he is overtaken by a "deep and terrifying darkness." As the sunset faded into night, a small pillar of fire and a small pillar of smoke appeared and passed through the blood at the bottom of the gully. Abraham never signed the covenant. God signed it twice.

Psalm 27

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

When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army encamps against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off; do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

This psalm is used liturgically in the fall during the season of Yom Kippur. The psalmist is adamant in his faith statements in the beginning but more pleading in the second half of the psalm.

“Devour my flesh” – an idiom with similar meaning to “back biting”

“House of the Lord” “tent” “high rock” - All of these terms refer to the Temple in Jerusalem. Prior to the Temple construction, Israel worshiped God in the “Tent of Meeting”, a term still ascribed to the Temple. The Temple was constructed on Mount Zion, one of two high hills in Jerusalem, which was a bald rock face used as a threshing floor before the Temple’s construction, so it was a “high rock”.

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He 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.

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.

In the passage immediately preceding this, Paul talks about the fact that salvation through Christ is a gift, not something that is earned through adherence to the law. Paul states that if anyone has a right to brag in adherence to the law, it would be him, but Paul’s encounter with Jesus has completely transformed his thinking and his relationship with God. Paul sees that nothing holds a candle to the grace of God manifest in Jesus.

In the above pericope, Paul urges the congregation in Philippi to do as he has done, set aside their accomplishments under the Law in favor of emptying themselves at the foot of Jesus’ cross.

Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” He 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. Yet 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.’ Jerusalem, 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! See, 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.’”

Of the Jews in Jesus’ day, the Pharisees were more closely aligned to Jesus’ ministry than any others. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus regularly dines with them, although those

dinner parties don't run very smoothly. Here the Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod is on the prowl for him. But why did Jesus call Herod a fox?

This is not Herod the Great, who was the Roman placed King of the Jews when Jesus was born. No, this is that Herod's son, Herod Philip tetrarch, meaning his dad's kingdom was divided into four and he now rules the part containing Galilee. He was a brown-noser who built a temple honoring Caesar Tiberius as a god in one of his subjects' towns, a sacrilegious act which violated almost all of the Ten Commandments and invoked hatred in his subjects. Jesus likely was not calling Herod Philip a fox because he was sly, but rather because he was "unclean" (foxes are unclean animals for Jews) and cunning.

"Today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work" – Jesus appears to be prophesying about this work in his death which will be completed on the third day in his resurrection.

"Yet today, and tomorrow and the next day I must be on my way" – Jesus is prophesying about the fact that he is working his way up to Jerusalem for his death, since it is only in Jerusalem that the High Priest and Sanhedrin will arrest those they deem "heretics", that is prophets with whom they disagree, and execute them.

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem: Here we glimpse the eternal divinity of Jesus. Jesus speaks of His history with the people of Jerusalem: suffering through their centuries of idol worship and disobedience, sending them prophets who they ignored and killed. Jerusalem was to be the holy seat of God's presence with Israel and the world, but instead it was the seat of corruption and blasphemy. Jesus' heart breaks over the generations of people in Jerusalem who were dragged along by their heretic kings. Since Jerusalem has rejected God, Jesus will leave them to their own devices until Palm Sunday.