

Bible Tuesday for Pentecost 9, 2019

Genesis 15:1-6

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.”² 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?”^{[a]3} And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.”⁴ 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.”⁵ 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.”⁶ And he believed the Lord; and the Lord^[b] reckoned it to him as righteousness.

“These things” is the is that Lot went in the opposite direction as Abram and settled in the valley where Sodom and Gomorrah were. Also, Abram met and was blessed by Melchizedek. An raiding party marched on Sodom, looted it, and took some human captives, including Lot. Abram took his slaves and attacked the army, rescuing Lot.

These verses are unclear. God had promised to Abram and Sara back in chapter 12 that Abram would have an heir. However, none has been born yet, so did Abram adopt his chief slave, Eliezer of Dammesek as his heir in absence of one born from his own body? Abram is in his 90’s and Sara is in her 80’s. Abram is wealthy; healthy enough to lead an attack against a raiding party, and yet has no child of his own who will inherit not only his wealth, but his honor, his reputation. He is feeling hopeless and desperate. When God does speak to him, Abram lays the facts out as he sees them.

“With nothing more than an extravagant reiteration of the promise of offspring, Abram drops his question and trusts in the Lord. “And thus you find” observes an ancient midrash about this verse, “that our father Abraham inherited this world and the world to come only as a reward for the faith that he had” states Rabbi Ishmael. In the Tanakh, (Hebrew Bible) faith does not mean believing in spite of the evidence. It means trusting profoundly in a person, in this case the personal God who has reiterated His promise.” Hebrew Study Bible

Psalms 33:12-22

Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.

¹³ The Lord looks down from heaven;
he sees all humankind.

¹⁴ From where he sits enthroned he watches
all the inhabitants of the earth—

¹⁵ he who fashions the hearts of them all,
and observes all their deeds.

¹⁶ A king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

- 17 The war horse is a vain hope for victory,
and by its great might it cannot save.
- 18 Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,
- 19 to deliver their soul from death,
and to keep them alive in famine.
- 20 Our soul waits for the Lord;
he is our help and shield.
- 21 Our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.
- 22 Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,
even as we hope in you.

This psalm is full of effusive praise for God. The omitted verses acclaim God's credentials as creator of all. The opening verses of this pericope speak of Israel's special relationship with God, God's chosen people. In the Hebrew Scriptures, God is above humanity, with only his footstool on earth, in the Temple. This is contrasted with God incarnate, Jesus, who walked among us, and the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

Verses 16-19 draw on war images. Nations do trust in their arms races over and against God. The results of warfare, death and famine--both of which the faithful look to God.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² Indeed, by faith^[a] our ancestors received approval. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.^[b]

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised.^[c] ¹² Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

¹³ All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, ¹⁴ for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Whereas the editor of the Hebrew Study Bible defined faith as complete trust in a person, the author of Hebrews defines it as trust that what ones needs will come about. While the Hebrews author doesn't say this explicitly, the intimation is that God will bring about what is needed, and therefore faith is still defined relationally.

This is part of the famous "faith" chapter of Hebrews. Note how this chapter connects Christianity to Judaism. That may seem like an obvious statement, but so much of Christianity in the United States either divorces itself from Judaism or sees Judaism as a tool whereby to compel Jesus' second coming. The writer of Hebrews is merely growing his/her understanding of God, building on the foundation Jewish faith learned from youth.

Abraham was promised a son of his and Sarah's own, a land that his progeny would call their own, and that his progeny would be a blessing to all people of the earth. The writer points out that God made a promise to Abraham which was not completely fulfilled until Jesus. Scholars date Abram and Sara anywhere from 1800-1400 BCE and Jesus's at around 30 CE. That means God's promise, which he reiterated 4 times to Abraham, was not fulfilled for at least 1400 years. Yet Abraham had faith, as did Isaac and Jacob.

Luke 12:32-40

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailling treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. ³⁷ Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. ³⁹ "But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he^[a] would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Immediately preceding the above passage, Jesus exhorts his disciples "don't worry over what you shall eat or what you shall drink or what you shall wear." Knowing that these are basic to human life and knowing that he is speaking to people at the bottom of Roman society, people who don't get meals every day, Jesus still insists anxiety is not appropriate.

In this society, not only is clothing a necessity, it is also a great source of honor or shame. Remember the wedding garment parable that Jesus teaches, where the host provides wedding garments for those guests who cannot afford them. Clothing is so important in that society that it is incumbent upon the host of a feast to protect his guests from dishonor by dressing them appropriately if they cannot afford to do so themselves.

Security, Jesus insists, does not come from knowing where your next meal is or whether or not you can dress yourself. Security comes from faith in God, being in right relationship

with God, that is, living in the Kingdom of God. Jesus then assures the disciples that God is making them all heirs to His Kingdom, a place of great feasting where suffering is ended.

Sell all your stuff, give the money to the poor! Is this traditional Hebrew hyperbole? Does Jesus really mean for us to divest ourselves of all food, clothing, and shelter? If so, how can we serve in the Kingdom of God if we are dying of starvation, exposure, and begging for our every meal? "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." If one is starving to death, one cannot think of anything other than getting food for one's self and one's loved ones. The verses immediately following this statement Jesus commands his disciples to "be prepared." Jesus doesn't want his disciples to be starving, or naked, but he does want us to be focused on the tasks at hand. "Don't get weighed down or distracted by your debts or your retirement accounts. Do waste your time shopping or feathering your nests. Put your time and energy into following my lead and being ready for God among you. Then you will experience what really matters, life in God."