

2nd Sunday in Lent

Year A

Colour purple

First reading Genesis 12.1-4

The Call of Abram

Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

What's going on?

In trying to understand who Jesus was and what he was called by God to do, we go back to the call of the great Hebrew patriarch, Abraham. Abraham was called directly by God to go forth and establish the nation of Israel, who were to be a holy people before God. God's promise to Abraham is that if he responds to the call, leaving his home and family and all that he might wish to preserve, in order to do God's will, then God will bless him for his obedience and through Abraham bring blessing upon the whole of human kind. Abraham hears the call and does as God asks, obediently.

Psalm 121

Assurance of God's Protection

A Song of Ascents.

I lift up my eyes—
from where will my help come?

My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

**He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.**

**The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.**

**The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.**

**The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and for evermore.**

What's going on?

This psalm promises that God holds everyone in his protection. Human beings who trust in God are kept always in God's memory and care. The psalm is not saying that nothing bad can ever happen, but that nothing can happen without God caring about it. In the previous reading we learned that God calls people and blesses them, even though what they are called to do can feel insecure, scary or risky. This psalm confirms that when we are called to do as God asks, we are assured that God will never leave or abandon us, no matter what happens.

Romans 4.1-5; 13-17

The Example of Abraham

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

God's Promise Realized through Faith

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. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

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, 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.

What's going on?

St Paul uses the example of Abraham to make a point about how we respond to God. There is a difference, he says, with just keeping religious law and being obedient that way, and really responding to God in faith. He says that Abraham did not do what he did, leaving his family and country because of something in religious law, but because he had faith that God was really calling him to do it. Because he took the risk of faith, God blessed him. For us then, we need to respond in faith to God, not just follow religious law, because faith makes it possible to make sense of the extraordinary things God does, including raise someone from the dead as he did in Jesus.

Gospel: John 3.1-17

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of

water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

What's going on?

The previous passages have told us a great deal about vocation. God calls people and asks them to respond to his purpose for them, through faith. Here we see a very important event in the gospels when Nicodemus, a leader and teacher of the Jewish religion comes to Jesus to learn from him. First Jesus tells Nicodemus that responding to God's call involves a rebirth. Nicodemus is confused and thinks that Jesus means something physical, but Jesus says that a person who responds fully to God's call is remade through the Spirit of God into a new kind of person. This spiritual birth equips us to be fully alive in God and ready to enter into eternal life with God. TO have a spirit filled existence makes us focus on God rather than on our own desires and helps us to do what God wants for us. We start to be heavenly rather than earthly thinkers, aware not just of this life, but of our ultimate destiny to be with God.

Having explained this to Nicodemus, Jesus then reveals his own calling, - to be the person that makes it possible for every human person to realise what they are missing in their lives and turn to a Spirit-filled existence. Jesus has come not with an immediate judgement, but in order to carry out God's will to bring salvation.