

Scripture Readings and Sermon

March 13, 2022 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Genesis 15:1-6

The story of Abram begins in Chapter 12 of Genesis with Abram call. "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." After some misadventures in Egypt and with Lot, Abram has finally become settled in the land that God has shown him. God once again comes to Abram and affirms the promised made in that original call, "I will make you a great nation". Abram questions this since he has no heir but God promises that his descendants will outnumber the stars.

Genesis 15:6 And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Why did Abram believe in the LORD?

What proof or miracle was there to cause Abram to take such a risk?

Could faith be an assurance that can only be experienced in the heart?

How does that assurance change the way you approach the world/religion?

When have you tried to explain your faith to someone who never had the experience?

If assurance comes from God, than can there ever be works righteousness?

Commentary on Luke 13:31-35

This text, which refers to Jesus' death, comes in the middle of a series of teachings about the kingdom of God. Preaching about "kingdoms" in the Galilee area seems to have gotten Herod's attention. Herod is referred to as a "fox" which in Greek texts usually refers to someone who is trying to be clever but in Hebrew texts the fox is an animal of destruction. Could Jesus be combining these two meanings to suggest that at times human cleverness is destructive to God's plans. Jesus however affirms that no amount of cleverness will change his path to the cross. The third day, Jerusalem, and the cry of 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord' all point to Holy Week from Jesus triumphal entry, his crucifixion, and his resurrection on the third day.

Luke 13:34 How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

Do you remember a time when you choose your way rather God's way?

Why do we think we know better?

Does a sense of control help us address our fear in an uncertain world?

What do you have to give up in order to follow God's direction?

Can you give up control if you still hold onto fear?

What does it mean to you to have a loving God who has a plan for good?

Commentary on Philippians 3:17-4:1

Paul invites the Philippians to join him and others in pressing on toward the heavenly goal. Those who have given up because of suffering and instead have chosen what Bonhoeffer would call "cheap grace" will ultimately find that the gift of salvation was squandered and buried under earthly things. Salvation into the kingdom of God means to act as citizens of heaven even during earthly suffering. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul urges the church not to see suffering as a sign of disfavor but rather as the Christian pattern. Paul himself has "become confident by my chains" (1:14) and says that to "die is gain" (1:21). Christ himself "became obedient even to the point of death, even death on the cross"(2:8). Paul states that "if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice."(2:17) Looking toward the resurrection, Paul views

suffering as just a temporary and at times necessary state. He invites "the fellowship of His sufferings, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection of the dead".(3:11) In this context, the text today views those who seek comfort rather than the cross as those to be most pitied for they will not know the heavenly prize. Paul therefore urges the suffering church to "stand firm in the Lord" for in this way they will "be conformed to the body of his glory." As citizens, we should rejoice in our salvation and give thanks at all times. Paul says that we are called to treat other citizens with gentleness and respect since the Lord is near.

Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you think of yourself as having dual citizenship?

Which commands your loyalty?

Is it easier if you think of heaven as future and distant?

What if in Jesus, heaven is expected to be revealed on Earth now through you?

Does that change how you view personal holiness, social holiness and citizenship?

What does this say about how we deal with and react to suffering?

Reflection on Genesis 15:1-6, Luke 13:31-35, Philippians 3:17-4:1

Sermon "There is a Plan"

By faith, Abram left his home and business to follow a new God of all gods. Despite challenges and detours, Abram at last arrived and God accounted his faith as righteousness. Even when it appeared that he would have no children, Abram had faith that God had a plan and would fulfill His promise. Jesus also had faith that the Father had a plan. And even though that plan meant death in Jerusalem, Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem and would not be turned. Herod, despite his cleverness, could not thwart God's plan.

The message for us today is that God has a plan for each of us. Even in the midst of our suffering or the suffering of the world, God still has a plan. That plan may be distorted through free will choices, but in the end, which may take longer to arrive at, that plan will come to fruition. We are citizens of heaven where God and not humanity is ultimately in charge. The Herods of the world may try to divert us but if we walk by faith it will be accounted to us as righteousness. Therefore, stand firm in Jesus even when surrounded by enemies of the cross. It is through the cross that we find our salvation. The covenant that was broken has been restored and the people who were once lost have been found. During this Lent, reflect on those things that try to distract you from God's plan for you and remember to stand firm in God's promises.