

Promise Everlasting

Promise of Lent: Part 2 “Promise Everlasting”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – February 28, 2021

2nd Sunday in Lent

Readings: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

Reflection: Psalm 22:23-31

Greeting: Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. (*Isaiah 2:5,3c*)

Prayer: Everlasting God, because of your tender mercy toward all people, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon himself our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all should follow the example of his great humility. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of his patience through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 22

You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it. (Psalm 22:23-31 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 22 and hear of God’s generosity. We hear of how God sees those in need and helps them. That all should turn to God to be saved. That future generations will hear of the Lord and serve him. How do you speak about God’s presence in your life? How do you speak about God to others? How do you seek to do good in the eyes of the Lord? How can we all work together to further God’s kingdom?

Prayer: Almighty God, your blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan. Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations. And, as you know the weakness of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; thorough Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Genesis chapter 17, verses 1 through 7 and 15 through 16.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."
(Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 NRSV*)

Our next reading is from Romans chapter 4, verses 13 through 25.

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. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.
(Romans 4:13-25 NRSV*)

Our last reading is from Mark chapter 8, verses 31 through 38.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said

all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

(Mark 8:31-38 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We look at promises once again this week in our Lenten series. And this week come to promise everlasting. We begin in Genesis, and in it we have Abram in his old age, and the Lord comes to him with a covenant. This is before his name change. We get a little bit of a reflection on last week's message about new beginnings, because in this Abram and Sarai are given what I think of as a new beginning with new names. This promise is made that Abram will be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. That he is going to be exceedingly fruitful. That kings will come from his line. And that the promise isn't just to Abram, the promise is to all of the offspring after. That the promise is everlasting. An interesting part of this is that in the first we have today, it doesn't say what all the terms are, but that the promise will be that God will be the God of Abram and his descendants. Basically saying, "I will always be your God." We get a reflection of this in Romans and Paul takes a bit of a deep look at this in that this promise didn't come as a matter of law. And I think it's important that we recognize that because it's not that there was a setup of "do these things and then" but a promise was made in faith. Faith that Abram, or Abraham, would have these things happen. It was his faith in God and God's faith in Abraham, and that it was faith that made this promise hold and faith that made him the father of many nations.

One of the interesting things about this is that when this promise is made, part of that new beginning for this everlasting covenant is that Abram and Sarai are given new names. Abram becomes Abraham. Sarai becomes Sarah. And this is interesting because the changes give each name a new meaning. Abram was the "exalted father", but Abraham is the "father of many nations." Sarai becomes Sarah, echoing the name change of Abraham, signaling her role as well. It's interesting that they're given new names because they're given new roles in this new promise. One based on faith, faith that God will raise them up to give them a multitude. That God will always be their God if they follow him. That's what we have in mind when we come to our Gospel reading. Jesus is teaching about how the Son of Man will have to go through great suffering. That he's going to be rejected. He'll die and rise again. And apparently this upset Peter. Peter takes Jesus aside and tells him he can't say these things. But Jesus rebukes Peter. And the rebuke might sound a little harsh to us today. "Get behind me Satan."

And one might think that was a terrible insult. But it helps if we think about the word Satan as “the adversary”. And in this case, Peter is being an adversary because he is trying to get Jesus to stop preaching what he's supposed to preach because he's worried. Not about what this would mean to his faith, not about what this means in the divine aspect of things, but Peter's worried about worldly retribution. Peter is worried about reputation. Peter is worried about what's going to do then in there. And so, he's setting himself up to be an adversary to Christ. Jesus then makes a call to faith. “If anyone can become my followers let them deny themselves and take their cross and follow me.” Now, when we take this in relationship to what he just said to Peter it's that you've got to give up the idea of what's important here and now and look at what's important overall. Follow Christ in faith and you will gain life. Because what's the worth of the whole world if you lose your life trying to pursue it.

Now we might wonder what these readings have to do with each other. And I was reading this, and I realized that the call that Jesus makes is a call to faith. A call to a new promise coming. And it's in the same vein as call of faith to Abraham, that Abraham is called, and God promises to be always be the God of Abraham and his descendants. A promise everlasting. Now we know from what happens between here and what happens in the Gospel is that we get the law, and the people fail. Trying to be saved through the law doesn't work. And so, another covenant needs to be made to be able to bring people in to give them salvation. Now, as we look at the promise of Lent, that's the promise that we have throughout all of it is the promise we can be saved. And we have Abraham following in faith and Christ calling people to faith. Don't worry about what your expectations are but believe. Don't think that just because people are going to get angry and think that it's nonsense that you should give up on faith. We are called to take up our cross and follow.

We could get into a bit of a stumbling block when we come to the idea of what it means to deny yourself and take up your cross. Well, when I was thinking about this in the context of Lent and looking at what had just happened with Peter and thinking about this covenant with Abraham, and it's that we can't put trust in ourselves. Abraham wasn't called to trust in himself that he would become the father of many nations in his old age. But Abraham was called to have faith that God would get him there. He was to deny himself, to stop trying to make things happen himself and believe that he could get it done, deny himself and submit. Resign himself that God would do what God said he would do. That if he put himself in God's hands and trusted in God's promise, everything would happen. This is the same thing that Christ is asking when Peter gets so worried. Have faith that if God says it will happen, that it will happen. And that's why Peter gets the strong rebuke that he gets, because Peter isn't denying himself at that point. He isn't willing to let go of this idea that he's got to worry about what this will mean for his status, but that he has to think about what it means for faith. Not only his but for others. And what it means that this promise is always there. That if God has been the God of all the people, the God that made this promise to Abraham, that God isn't going anywhere. That this is an everlasting covenant, and that God is opening up a new chapter. And that we have to have

faith that if we believe that God is the God of all, that this is our God, that we have to trust that God is going to take care of us and do what he says. Those who want to save their life will lose it, because they will not think about what they're actually after. That we must give our lives over for Christ's sake. That if we give our lives over to God, then God will save them. That if we put all our focus on the things that we think we need to do and our own aims and goals, and never think about God, then all we are doing is saving things in this world and not thinking about God's purpose. Because what do I get if I gain the whole world, but I lose God? In the end, nothing. I will fade away and be left with nothing.

I think that's an important thing to recognize that when we think about taking up our cross and following Christ, it means that we follow in his path. When I think about it, I think about taking up the teachings of Christ and following his teachings, in his ways, in his love and mercy, and in his grace. He says everything that's going to happen to him. He'll be rejected and killed. And after three days rise again. And that's not on us to do it, but to believe it. To believe that God is there, the same way that Abraham believed that God was there for him. Through faith. Through faith, that as we journey to the cross, that we believe that God will do what God says he will do. And that we allow God to work through us, not fighting for our own desires and needs, but letting ourselves be handed over so that God may make us whole, may build us up, may help us to do great things. Not for our own sake, not for the sake of worldly gain, but for the sake of sharing the good news. For the sake of sharing love. For the sake of sharing in God's promise that never ends. Because God will always be there. No matter what. So, as we journey to the cross this Lent, in faith let us remember the love of God the Father, the sacrifice of Christ the Son, and the ever-present guidance of the Holy Spirit. In these 40 days, let us follow Christ to the cross in faith, knowing that God is with us every step of the way. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. In these forty days, may God's grace be shown to us all, cleansing us from our sins, and restoring us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Promise of Lent

Our series is *Promise of Lent* and looks at the ways that we view God's promises during the season of Lent. Each week we look at the promises in a different light.

February 21st – *Promise of New Beginnings* - Genesis 9:8-17; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

February 28th – *Promise Everlasting* – Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

March 7th – *Promise of Justice* – Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

March 14th – *Promise of Salvation* – Numbers 21:4-9; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

March 21st – *Promise and Patience* – Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs		Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons
Trinity Powers	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Lois Woolever	Mary White
Nick Nichols	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes	Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center		

Rev Camron D St.Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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