

Out with the Old?

Questions of Faith: Part 4 “Our with the Old?”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – February 20, 2022

7th Sunday After Epiphany

Readings: Genesis 15:1-6; Acts 13:16-25; Luke 4:16-27

Reflection: Psalm 77

Greeting: The Lord by wisdom founded the earth. By understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the deeps broke open. And the clouds drop down the dew. Praise the Lord! (*Proverbs 3*)

Prayer: Lord, we turn to you this day that we may seek your wisdom. We know that all knowledge begins with you. Help us to walk in your ways and to follow the example set for us in Jesus Christ our redeemer. Bring us into your light so that we may live in your great love. Renew our spirit so that we may sing your praises and glorify your name. Strengthen our faith and our hope in your steadfast love and faithfulness, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 77

I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted. I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your wonders of old. I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples. With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered; your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters; yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.
(Psalm 77:1-2,11-20 NRSV*)

We read the words of Psalm 77 and hear of God’s works from of old. That we can remember all that God has done to help us recall that God is always with us. What comes to your mind when you think about God’s mighty deeds? Who comes to mind for you when you think of God’s love for his people? How does that inspire you today? How does that influence your life now? Does it help you grow in grace? Does it help you to reach out to God more fervently? What does it mean to you to seek God’s salvation?

Prayer: O Heavenly Father, you have watched over us all the days of our lives. Be with us now as we come to you with our worries and questions. Help us to find wisdom through your steadfast love. Help us to recall all that you have already done for all your children. We thank you that your ear is always turned towards us so that we may come to you with the joys and troubles in our hearts. We raise our prayers to you because of your steadfast love and faithfulness. We seek your grace and love through Jesus Christ 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 for today comes from Genesis chapter 15 verses 1 through 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." 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. (Genesis 15:1-6 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Acts chapter 13 verses 16 through 25.

So Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak: "You Israelites, and others who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. For about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. After he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance for about four hundred fifty years. After that he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel. Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. When he had removed him, he made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, 'I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes.' Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised; before his coming John had already proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his work, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of the sandals on his feet.' (Acts 13:16-25 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Luke chapter 4 verses 16 through 27.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim

release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:16-27 NRSV)*

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

So, I've had this question arise in conversation, and I thought I would address it as part of the series, because this can be something that can get to be a little confusing. And I titled this "out with the old," because sometimes there's this feeling that if we have the New Testament, it's the newer one, it's better, it replaces the old, we don't need the old anymore. And that's actually a rather widespread view in some areas, that the naming of the Testaments is Old and New itself can give us a bit of a negative feeling about the old because usually, we say "out with the old in with the new." But we don't want to do that in this case. The reason being that instead of thinking of the Old Testament as old and replaced by the new, the old is the established and the new was because it was built on top of the old. And so, if we think about it as a house, the Old Testament as our very solid foundation that we build the New Testament on. And I picked a few readings today just sort of to highlight all of the interconnectedness. You'll notice that there's not exactly a coherent theme that runs through our readings today. And you might be thinking, I'm trying to connect the dots but it isn't working. And here's the connection. It's that they all intertwine together to tell a full narrative. And when we leave parts out, that narrative becomes harder to understand.

We began with a reading from Genesis, the very first book of the Bible. And we have God's covenant with Abraham. And this covenant is referenced plenty of times in the New Testament. And it's really the basis of everything that comes after. In all the Bible following this point, this covenant with Abraham is one of the key points. Because it's Abraham's line that leads through Isaac and Jacob down to the line of David down to the line to Jesus. We see this in other places. Our reading from Acts I picked because Paul goes through this litany of events and things that have happened. He talks about what happened in the wilderness with Moses, and when the people came into the land, and when the people got judges, about the time of the prophet Samuel when the people ask for a king, and how David becomes king, and how it's David's line that leads to Christ. And what's interesting here is that Paul walks through most of the Old Testament in this statement. We touched on Genesis in our first reading when it talks about Abraham's covenant, and that leads up to the idea of the chosen people, Israel and their

stay in Egypt, which you hear about in Exodus. We hear more about it through Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy as the telling of the law. And then we have Joshua where the people come into the land. And then we have Judges, where judges arise to help rescue the people of Israel before there is a king. And then we have the books of Samuel, in which we have Samuel appointing a king for the people. And the tails of those kings come through the books of Kings and Chronicles. And so, Paul walks through almost all of the narrative sections of the Old Testament in this one go.

Then we come to our gospel reading. And it helps to make that connection to another section of the Bible. Because first, Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah. And then he speaks of the other prophets, specifically Elijah and Elisha. This plays out in both the narrative books and the books of the prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all have prophetic books and then the shorter books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. And we may not recognize all of those names at first. But then we remember some of the prophecies that come into play at various times in the year. Prophecies about Bethlehem, of Judah. Prophecies about the coming Messiah. And what we get isn't just old stories that have been replaced, but we get a foundation that everything in the New Testament is built on what we have in the Old Testament.

And I think it's important for us to remember this. Because we sometimes feel that there is a disconnect from the Old Testament to the New Testament. And I can understand that because sometimes when we read some of the things in the Old Testament, we hear stories that can be difficult to understand and hard to interpret. Especially when they seem to be at odds with what we have in the New Testament. I would say to read them in light of the New Testament. Because one of the interesting things that we have in Scripture is the progressive revelation of God's character. It's not that the Old Testament lays out how people understood God and that holds true forever. What happens is that we have people trying to understand God. And often they're trying to understand God in a context that is very different from what they're used to. In some of the earliest times it's trying to understand having only one God, not something that was terribly common. And as that progresses, it starts as revering God above all other gods and acknowledgement of other gods and becomes the belief that there is but one God. And sometimes that can be hard for us to grasp, because we read things the way we read the New Testament where there's a lot more settled. Not everything, but it's hard for us to understand some of the viewpoints that we get in some of the very old narratives that we have in the Bible. But as we read, we get a continual unveiling of God's character. And most of that is people discovering just how much God loves them. And it's like this continual surprise that they expected God's love to only go so far, but it keeps going further and further than they expected. Until we get that great show of love in Christ. But it's hard to understand that great show of love in Christ without everything that leads up to that moment.

It would be like trying to pick up a TV show in the last few episodes. We are missing a lot of context and a lot of background when we do that. To help make this point, I picked up one of

the Bibles I had on hand that wasn't a study Bible. There were around 1500 pages in the Old Testament. And then we have about 450 pages to the New Testament. And out of that a smaller section is our Gospel accounts comprising only four books of the New Testament. About 200 or fewer pages out of all that is there. And the New Testament is constantly referencing the Old Testament. In just the few readings we have today, we went through a huge section of the Old Testament in references and that was just from a few choice verses. Matthew begins with a genealogy reference that spans the Old Testament. The Epistles are filled with references. You can't get very far in the New without seeing the Old. So, I encourage all of you to go read the Old Testament. Especially if you've never read all of it. Now, I will say this, if you're not sure how to start, there are a lot of different plans out there. And if you talk to me, I might be able to find one that will work for you. And sometimes it's reading different parts of the Bible every day so that you're never only in one place. Some people can read straight through. I'm one of those people. I can start at the beginning and go to the very end. But there's times where it's easier to move around so that you don't feel stuck. And there will be places in the Old Testament that it can feel sluggish. And I say that lovingly, not in any way to disrespect the text. But sometimes you can only dig through so many lists of generations or so many repetitions of measurements before you start to rub your eyes and wonder what you're reading.

But they're all there for a reason. Because they all add something to this enormous story of how we interact with God. And in that nothing in our relationship with God is ever old. Whether it be in the Old or the New Testament, it's all about that relationship that we have together with God through Christ. And so, to answer the question, "should we ignore the old?" Never, because it's the foundation that lets us fully understand God's relationship with us. It's the story that builds us up and helps us to understand just how strong God's love is. To understand just how much God has reached out to us throughout all generations. And it highlights the importance of Christ in our lives today by helping us understand the story of how we got to where we are now. And that story continues to play out in our lives today. So, I would never say that the old is not worth having. But instead know that the entirety of the Bible is there for us to be able to learn and grow, to gain wisdom and further understanding. To see the depths of love and see how we can grow in that love. And that we have a foundation that strengthens us, that guides us, that leads us in all things through all parts of the Bible. And so let it be something that we take as a whole, knowing that there is always something more to be gained when we turn to the Word of God and seek its depths. Be it old or new, it is always good. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. Help us to live a life by your wisdom, that we may love and forgive through the grace of 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 – Questions of Faith

In this series, Pastor Cameron will be answering questions that have been asked of him at various times. If you have a question you'd like him to address as part of this series, just let him know.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley	Family of Jim Nichols
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Sue & Bob Smyser
Family of Bob White	Family of Sonya Bickers	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan
Adam McMechan			

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