

The Need to Know

The Dark Valley: Part 2 “The Need to Know”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – March 13, 2022

2nd Sunday in Lent

Readings: Luke 4:1-13

Reflection: Psalm 27

Greeting: Tear your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord for he is merciful and compassionate. God is very patient and full of faithful love. The Lord our God is always ready to forgive. (*Joel 2*)

Prayer: Lord, your mercy is always upon us. Be gracious to all those who have strayed from your ways and welcome them once again into your love. Lift us up so that we may always turn to you with repentant hearts and may embrace you in faith. Help us to hold to the eternal truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son, who with you and the Holy Spirit live and reign as one God, forevermore. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 27

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock. Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD. Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! “Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, LORD, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up. Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence. I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD! (Psalm 27 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 27 and hear of seeking God in difficulty. We hear of trusting in God in all things and in seeking God to help us. Do you ever find it difficult to wait for the Lord? Do you feel that God is your rock when you are in troubling times? How can you share the strength faith brings? How can we give comfort to others in the name of the Lord? How do you share in the love and faithfulness that Christ has shown you?

Prayer: Lord, we turn to you now in prayer. We come before you with the celebrations of the joys in our lives. We come before you with the troubles of our hearts. We look to you in all things that your steadfast love may guide and lead us. Help us in our doubts and worries and strengthen us in faith, through Jesus Christ, our faithful redeemer. May we find peace and grace through that same 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 reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Genesis chapter 4 verses 1 through 13.

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. Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

(Genesis 15:1-12,17-18 NRSV)*

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

So, we're revisiting a scripture that I used a few weeks ago. And we're doing this because there's something here that I think we can all relate to. In our reading with Abram, before being renamed Abraham, we have a promise being made. The word of the Lord comes to him in a vision and what we get is this back and forth where Abram just is not sure of what's

coming next. God tells Abram that his reward will be great. It's going to be big. But Abram wants to know what he'll be given. And he's told he'll be given an heir because Abram is worried that he doesn't have an heir. The Lord tells him his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. And then God says he's going to give Abram the land. Abram's response? "How am I to know?" That was what struck me with this reading. When thinking about the way that we deal with the hardships of life and with grief and loss that sometimes in the midst of that the need to know overrides almost everything else. And the reason that this was interesting for me is that here's God's promising great things for Abram. And the response isn't one of great praise and thanksgiving. It's "but how will I know? What assurance do I have?" And the reason I found this to be interesting is that quite often that's the response that we have when we are struggling.

Here's Abram old and without an heir. He doesn't know how to take in this idea that he's going to have numerous descendants. He doesn't know how to just accept that the land will be given to his offspring. He needs some sort of assurance. A sign that this is actually going to happen. And the reason I think we can relate to that is because I think all of us have been, at one time or another, at a point where we feel that we really don't know what's coming next. And even when people tell us good things are going to happen, we have a hard time believing it. Because sometimes when we are in that dark valley, we struggle to be able to see anything good. We struggle to think about a future that makes any sense. We have a difficult time thinking that there will ever be good times again. Even when we have the assurance that things will get better. Sometimes we get hung up on that need to know. And it eats at us. It eats at us because we're afraid. We are afraid to trust that things could ever be okay. And in the end, it's a fear that makes us always need to know. And this kind of fear of needing to know what happens next has been happening forever. I mean, we see it with Abram here, but we see it throughout the Bible. People wanting to know that what prophets say is true. And if they can't understand the prophets, the need to know drives them to try to come up with all sorts of explanations. The need to know is what has driven so many people to make guesses about when the end times are coming. Because somehow knowing God is there and knowing that it will happen someday isn't enough. A problem with this is that just like those people who have been trying to guess at the end times, we get distracted by the need to know and miss the here and now. And this can cause us to lose sight of everything that's going on around us. Sometimes it takes the form of wanting to know why something happened. And the need to know why consumes us to the point that we stop living our lives. Because then everything is the past and trying to figure out why without ever looking ahead to see the here and the now. This becomes a problem for us because when we obsess over that need to know it can cause us to become more anxious and more stressed. The more that we try to plan and the more that we try to figure out the unknown, the deeper we fall into that hole. It can become an obsession that consumes us completely. After a while it feels like faith isn't enough because the need to know has overcome everything.

This may lead you to ask, “what we can do?” This leads us to one of the most difficult things we may have to do. Let it go. Let go of the need to know, the need to be in control, the need to have all the details. And that can mean letting go of the past. And I don't say that thinking that we completely forget everything. But it means we stop picking over the details of what was so that we can start looking to what is and what will be. And with that, we begin accepting that whatever comes Christ is with us. Because for me that's a bigger comfort than I could ever gain from understanding why various things have happened in my life. Because one of the things that we discover through faith is that if we trust Christ to guide us through this life, we have to trust that he knows better than we do. That he'll know what it is we're going to need. And sometimes we really don't need to know. This can be hard because we like knowing. We like knowing why things have happened. And the problem is that sometimes things just happen. And no matter how damaging they are and hurtful they are and destructive they are sometimes we have to be able to accept that it's out of our hands. In our reading today Abram was shown innumerable stars and told that he was going to have numerous descendants. What Abram wasn't given was a detailed road map of how this would happen. God gives him a sign, but not a set of exact instructions. It's faith that we have to go with. To be able to say that we can trust that God will get us through. That we can trust that the Holy Spirit will be with us wherever we go. And that however long it takes to get out of those dark times, that it will be the light of Christ that will get us out. It's accepting that we don't have to know the exact path that we will take. We don't need to know all the details coming down the road. It means we may not understand exactly what road got us to where we are but knowing that wherever we are God is still with us.

The reason this is so important is because I have seen many people lose their faith over this need to know. I'm not saying that we walk around blindly ignorant of the things around us. I'm not saying that we don't learn from our mistakes. I'm not saying that we give up completely on ever knowing anything. But what I'm saying is that we have to give up some of the control that we think we have and put our lives into God's hands. We need to take that peace and accept it, to reside in that love and know that that love is enough to get us through all things. No matter what happened yesterday, no matter what happens today, no matter what happens tomorrow, that love is enough. And so, my prayer for you is that you may let go of anything that is holding you back from being able to live today. That you be able to let go of that desperate need to know everything that's happened, to let go of all of the questions of “why?” and “how?” and “what next?” so that you may embrace today. So that you may be able to believe that there will always be light, even in those darkest times. When that long shadow is cast, sometimes it casts itself across the years and the only reason we're still walking in that shadow is because we can't stop focusing our lives on that shadow. We have to be able to let go. That even if we go into the unknown, Christ is there with us. Even if we step out into a world that we're unsure of, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit will be with us. That even if we don't know what comes next, we know that our heavenly Father will be watching over us. So, in this season of reflection during Lent, I pray that we may all reflect on what's still holding us back

from living a full life in Christ today. So that we can let go of the need to know and embrace the love that is. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. 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 – *The Dark Valley*

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
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart
Ronnie Winstead	Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch
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Family of Roger VanScyoc	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Sue & Bob Smyser
Larry Thompson	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Darrell Quick	

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