

Looking to Lent: Facing Adversity

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – March 16 2025

2nd Sunday in Lent

Readings: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35 NRSVUE

Reflection: Psalm 3

Call to Worship: The Lord is my light and my salvation. Should I fear anyone? The Lord is a fortress protecting my life. Should I be frightened of anything? Lord, listen to my voice when I cry out—have mercy on me and answer me! Hope in the Lord! Be strong! Let your heart take courage! Hope in the Lord! (Psalm 27)

Prayer: Everlasting God, we thank you for the tender mercy you show to all people. We are thankful that you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to be of our flesh, and to suffer death on a cross, that all could see and follow the example of his great humility. Help us to overcome the many difficulties that we face in this life. May you always strengthen us by your Holy Spirit that we may face any adversity because you are with us. Mercifully grant that we can follow the example of patience and love shown to us in Jesus. May we embrace his resurrection that we may know life and have it abundantly. Heavenly Father, watch over us in worship this day. Guide us in singing and prayer by your Spirit. And help us to gather in the peace and the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 3

¹ O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; ² many are saying to me, "There is no help for you in God." ³ But you, O Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head. ⁴ I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy hill. ⁵ I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the Lord sustains me. ⁶ I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. ⁷ Rise up, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.

⁸ Deliverance belongs to the Lord; may your blessing be on your people! (Psalm 3 NRSVUE)*

We read the words of Psalm 3, and we hear of facing adversity. That we should remember that God is on our side in every difficulty. That we may face hardships, but we face them with our redeemer. That the Lord lifts us up and strengthens us by faith. That we have deliverance. How can you rely upon God when adversity threatens to weaken your faith? How can you turn to Christ when things are difficult? How will you continue to face your problems this Lent? How can we work together to face them in Christ?

Prayer: Merciful God, we seek your presence with us in this place. We know you are with us in the good and the bad and the unknown. Help us through the easy and the difficult, for we know that your Holy Spirit is our guide and teacher in all circumstances. Today we ask you to help us to face adversity, knowing you are there to support us in all things. May these forty days be a time of reflection so that we may mend our ways and turn our faces to you, O God. We lift up our prayers to you on this day, knowing that you are always more ready to listen than we are to speak. We lift up the prayers that we voice together and the prayers we keep deep within our

hearts. May you guide us, lead us, and strengthen us so that we can face whatever tomorrow may bring. May we remember you in our mourning and our dancing. May we find you in our weeping and our laughter. And may we always remember that whatever we face, we always face it together with your steadfast love and faithfulness. Bless us and keep us that we may walk in the ways of 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 Updated Edition Bible. Our first reading is from Genesis chapter 15, verse 1 through 12 and verse 17 through 18.

15 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." 2 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?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." 4 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." 5 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." 6 And he believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness. 7 Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 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." 10 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. 11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. 17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 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 NRSVUE)*

Our next reading is from Philippians chapter 3, verse 17 through chapter 4, verse 1.

17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. 4 1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. (Philippians 3:17-4:1 NRSVUE)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 13, verse 31 through 35.

³¹ At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³² He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³ Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' ³⁴ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵ See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.' "
 (Luke 13:31-35 NRSVUE*)

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

This week our theme is Facing Adversity. And that adversity comes in many different ways. Part of this falls into some of the things we've talked about with doubts and temptations. One of the things we see in our readings today is a lack of trust. There's the way that adversity can cause us to lose faith. We can lose hope in the face of adversity. We waver when we face problems in life because we have to come face to face with things like humiliation and defeat. It means we have to take those head on and figure out how to overcome them. It means that we have to realize the problems we face and figure out how we deal with them.

We start with Genesis. Part of the adversity we see here is simply that Abraham's faith is wavering. Abraham has been told what will happen, that he'll have a great reward. It's just that with the way everything's going, he's not sure and he needs a little bit of reassurance. He wants to know who his heir will be because he was continuing to be childless. Abraham needs reassurance so the Lord shows him the stars in the sky and how his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. And Abraham believes. He just needed a little bit of encouragement. But again, we see that he needs a little bit more encouragement to overcome all of his worry because he wants to know that the promise is real. How will he know that he will possess the land? The Lord has him offer up a sacrifice. And once again, Abraham gets this reassurance about how numerous his descendants will be in the land they will have. The issue that I see here is that Abraham keeps doubting what will happen because things aren't going his way. The adversity he faces is really just the fact that it doesn't look like things are going to happen the way they're supposed to happen. And this is a problem that we all face when things aren't looking good. We start to wonder if they will ever be good. And again, it's where that foundation in faith comes in. When we don't lose faith just because things are getting tricky, we're able to get through those hurdles easier. But when we don't have that faith, things can get hard.

We hear about that in Paul's letter to the Philippians. We hear that it saddens Paul that some people are so adversarial. He is saddened by the way things are sometimes. But he is able to carry on. Because Paul even speaks of how it brings him to tears how selfish people can be. Because what he is discussing in this reading is selfishness. That all they think about is what they can get for themselves. We are supposed to remember that we are expecting a Savior and that we have to stand firm. We shouldn't give in to selfish desires. We are not to become like those who are selfish, but to stand firm, remembering that Christ is with us. And he talks about the transformation so that we are in Christ's glory. I was thinking about that because that transformation is something we have discussed before. It is the kind of thing

that does strengthen us by faith. That we are transformed as the body of Christ. We are bound together by faith and by love. And because of those things, we have the strength that we need to overcome adversity. This includes struggles with people who think of only themselves. You might wonder how that's a struggle, but it can be a struggle if it's people we care about. It can be a struggle if it is people who can make our lives more difficult because of their selfishness. The example we are given is how to live a life and live it abundantly in Christ. But we constantly see people who are not doing that. There are people in our lives that may make our lives more difficult. It is then we need to remember that we are in control of ourselves and not others. We control how we respond in Christ. Faith can see us through those difficult times. Because when we have a strong faith, we are able to overcome any adversity, because we never do it alone.

That brings us to our gospel reading. The adversity begins with someone wanting to cause trouble. The Pharisees come and tell Jesus that he needs to leave because Herod wants to kill him. Jesus says to tell him that he's busy. That's basically his reply, that he needs to keep going. That he is headed for Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets. The city that stones those who are sent to it. His opinion is that Jerusalem is a city of adversity. Why does he want to go? Because he wants to gather the people. Jesus knows the danger, but still he wants to go. He wants to reach out to the people that he can save. He knows that this is a city that kills the prophets, but he knows there are people he wants to reach. He knows that not everyone will listen. He knows that people will be adversarial. He knows he won't be welcomed by everyone with open arms. But this doesn't change his desire to save them. It doesn't change his desire to do good. I was thinking about that because his desire to save people is not dependent on other people desiring to be saved. I note this because often when we think about helping someone, there's that initial idea that they have to want help. And though it is true that people have to accept help if it is going to make a difference, we can desire to help people that don't initially want to be helped. We can want good things for them, even if they don't want them for themselves. Because we don't have to have people be reciprocal of our love in order for us to love. That's an adversity we set up for ourselves. Because we can make it seem that we have to have somebody desire our help before we can offer it. But I'm reminded that Christ loved us before we were capable of loving him. The example set for us in Christ is to love regardless. To love those whom need loved. If they don't want that love, then that is on them, not on you. If they do not want that kind of care, that is on them and not you. Because Christ can transform hearts and lives. Paul didn't wander around saying, if only I could see Christ before converting. The Bible is full of people messing up before they get things right. One of the biggest things that we can put in our way is ourselves. Because we often set up rules to make it harder for us to love and harder for us to care. That one of the adversities that we face is our own doubts, our own worries, our own fears, our own anxieties, and we frustrate ourselves. We let them manifest as stumbling blocks that stand in the way of us doing what is right.

I've been thinking about all of this during Lent, because it is a time of reflection and a time where we look inward to see what it is we can change in ourselves. We look inward to see what it is we are getting right and what it is we are doing wrong. And we strive to be better. And we do that in the face of adversity. Because there are always going to be things that get in our way. There are always going to be difficulties. Because I can name off the top of my head a dozen different things that might get in the way of ministry. But it doesn't mean I don't do it. Will there be struggles? Yes. Will there be hardships? Of course. Will there

be difficulties? Oh, so many. Will I get discouraged? Yes. Will I have my feelings hurt? Yes. Will I get angry? Of course. Will it make me sad? There will be times. All of those things are true and yet, I still think it's important to do the work of ministry to share the Gospel. Because through all of that adversity, my faith is that the love of Christ overcomes all of those things. That our God is a God of reassurance. Even when we are wavering. Our Savior is one that can see the good in us even if we are struggling to see it in ourselves. Our God is one who supports us even when things have grown difficult. Our Savior is one that dares to love even in the face of great harm. All because it's the right thing to do. Because blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. So, I pray we may be blessed. That in this time of reflection, we may reflect on the ways that we may overcome our adversity. That we may strengthen each other to overcome adversity. That we may build each other up in the love of our Savior so that we can overcome any obstacle. Because when we face our adversity, we know that we never face it alone. Because when we face adversity, we know that Christ is with us. That he always has been, that he is, and that he always will be by our side. 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. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. 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 – Looking to Lent

This series is a 5-week series plus Ash Wednesday and in it we will be discussing the various issues we face in life. Lent is a time of reflection and letting go, and as such we will be reflecting on the mindsets we can leave behind this year. We will discuss what we give up and what we take up when we face doubts, temptation, adversity, presumptions, indignation, and expectations during Lent. As we look to lent, we are reminded that we face everything with Christ.

3/5: Facing Doubt

3/9: Facing Temptation

3/16: Facing Adversity

3/23: Facing Presumptions

3/30: Facing Indignation

4/6: Facing Expectations

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