



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Lent 2, Year B
February 25, 2018

[RCL] Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:22-30; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Although Abraham and Sarah enacted their own solution in response to Sarah being unable to conceive a child (Abram had a child, Ishmael, with Hagar, Sarai's slave-girl), thirteen years later, God appears and reveals that Sarah will conceive a son, through whom Abraham will "be the ancestor of a multitude of nations." Sarah "will give rise to nations," and "kings of people will come from her." Abraham does not rationalize or make excuses for enacting his and Sarah's solution; he prostrates himself in response to being in the presence of Almighty God.

Reviewing one's life in the presence of God and identifying areas for correction need not cause shame and guilt; being in the presence of the Divine can evoke awe and humility, whatever one's present state of being. While one may sense that he or she has lost the way in discerning and following the ways of God, there are repeated invitations to turn back to God. Every day we may come before God to renew our relationship and the course of our lives in response to God's call.

- Are there any areas of your life in which God might be inviting you to change course or start anew?

Psalm 22:23-30

The passage from this psalm reveals an invitation to praise God in thanksgiving for God's acceptance of us. Our praise may take various forms, one of which is gathering for common worship. Gathering with our local communities, as communities of faith gather throughout the world, we are reminded of God's loving, merciful presence to all peoples. Moreover, our worship of God transcends time and space; through God, we remain connected with those whom we love, but see no longer.

- How might your praise and worship of God draw you into closer relationship with others?
- As you consider the people whom you love, but see no longer, how might worshipping God be an experience of being connected with them?

Romans 4:13-25

The themes of God's justice and righteousness are woven together throughout Paul's letter to the Romans. Today's reading explores the righteousness of Abraham, a righteousness bestowed through faith. Some of Paul's Jewish contemporaries boasted in their covenantal relationship with God as a unique bond between

themselves and God—a relationship to which the Gentiles did not have access. Paul, on the contrary, asserted that righteousness ultimately comes through faith. He presents Abraham as the ancestor of all the faithful, Jews and Gentiles alike. One’s righteousness through a covenantal relationship with God extends beyond ethnic identity; it is available to all people. Paul offers a message of unity in a context of division; that context of division is rooted in valuing ethnic identity above common humanity.

- As we reflect on the relevance of this message today, what conversations are creating divisions in the Church and in the world, and how might we, like the apostle Paul, be messengers of unity?

Mark 8:31-38

This passage from Mark includes an announcement of Jesus’ passion and a statement of conditions of discipleship. The juxtaposition of these two ideas reveals the connection between self-sacrifice and being a follower of Jesus.

“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.” Jesus addresses these challenging words to the crowd and his disciples. We, his present-day disciples, can hear these words addressed to our lives— what we wish to save or preserve, and what we are willing to give up. Being inordinately attached to aspects of one’s “life,” in terms of external attributes and circumstances, can diminish the vitality of one’s interior life, one’s soul. Jesus invites us, as we consider his life and ours, to seek the perspective of God in discerning how to nurture our souls and devote ourselves to living the Gospel in faithful service to Jesus.

- What areas of your life might God be inviting you to let go of in order to deepen and strengthen your interior life?
- What might it mean for you to “deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus,” in the present circumstances of your life?

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