LENT 2

Year C

Matthew Sanaker is a seminarian at Bexley Seabury Seminary.

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

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.

Commentary from Matthew Sanaker

This passage from Genesis is part of the origin story of the people of the ancient tribes of Israel. In ancient times, when this was part of an oral tradition and then later written down, it served to tell the people how they came to live in and possess the land. It is also a spiritual origin story, telling the ancient Israelites how they came to be in relationship with their God. For thousands of years, this story has been part of how people of the Abrahamic faiths have understood the beginnings of their respective covenantal relationships with God.

Abram was anxious about how the future that God promised him would come to pass. In his anxiety, he doubted whether the blessings of God would really be given to him. In this moment of fear, God asked Abram to make a sacrifice. In response to Abram's sacrifice, God blessed Abram and his unborn descendants. While those of us who are Christians living in the United States may not have much of a relationship with the land spoken of in the Scriptures, we are still in the line of covenantal relationships that started with Abram. As heirs of his spiritual lineage, God's promise of mercy is extended to us as an inheritance. And like Abram, we are asked by God to offer what we hold dear, even in those moments of our anxiety and doubt, to give back to the one who has given us everything, in recognition of our dependence upon his mercy and grace. He will continue to bless us in ways that we may find hard to imagine or understand.

Discussion Questions

In this season of Lent, what is God asking you to sacrifice so that you might be blessed and be a blessing to others?

In your own life, when you were anxious about the future, how did God bless you in unexpected ways?

Psalm 27

[1] The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear? *
the Lord is the strength of my life;
of whom then shall I be afraid?
[2] When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, *
it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who
stumbled and fell.
[3] Though an army should encamp against me, *
yet my heart shall not be afraid;
[4] And though war should rise up against me, *
yet will I put my trust in him.
[5] One thing have I asked of the Lord;
one thing I seek; *
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all
the days of my life;
[6] To behold the fair beauty of the Lord *
and to seek him in his temple.
[7] For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe
in his shelter; *
he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling
and set me high upon a rock.
[8] Even now he lifts up my head *
above my enemies round about me.
[9] Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation
with sounds of great gladness; *
I will sing and make music to the Lord.
[10] Hearken to my voice, O Lord, when I call; *
have mercy on me and answer me.
[11] You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." *
Your face, Lord, will I seek.
[12] Hide not your face from me, *
nor turn away your servant in displeasure.
[13] You have been my helper;
cast me not away; *
do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.
[14] Though my father and my mother forsake me, *
the Lord will sustain me.
[15] Show me your way, O Lord; *
lead me on a level path, because of my
enemies.
[16] Deliver me not into the hand of my adversaries, *
for false witnesses have risen up against me,
and also those who speak malice.
[17] What if I had not believed
that I should see the goodness of the Lord *
in the land of the living!
[18] O tarry and await the Lord's pleasure;
be strong, and he shall comfort your heart; *
wait patiently for the Lord.

Commentary from Matthew Sanaker

In the Psalms, we find the expression of almost every human emotion. In this psalm, we hear the author expressing his confidence that the Lord will save him from those who seek to do him harm. Beneath this confidence, we also hear the fear of one who is surrounded by his enemies, one living through war. The psalmist has been let down or betrayed by his closest family and he pleads with God not to turn away from him in his time of trouble. He expresses his trust in God to save him, he glorifies God and asks God to be present for him. There is a tension here between his faith in God and his almost overwhelming fear of the outcome if God does not save him. He seems to be speaking as much to comfort his own spirit that trembles within him as he is to God, to remind himself of his faith in the face of his fear.

Discussion Questions

What times of adversity have you experienced during which you have found strength in your relationship with God?

How have you experienced the emotions expressed by the psalmist?

Philippians 3:17-4:1

[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.

Commentary from Matthew Sanaker

In this part of his letter, St. Paul is encouraging the people of the Church in Philippi to live lives worthy of the calling that they have heard to follow the Gospel, the way of Jesus Christ. Elsewhere in this letter, Paul describes the way of the cross as living with humility, doing nothing selfish, and instead considering the needs of others. Here he is warning the church not to live as many around them do, as slaves to their own desires for earthly things, as though "their god is the belly." Paul could very well be speaking to us, living in a consumer culture, where we are enticed endlessly to follow every desire, to crave more, and to fulfill those cravings with what is being marketed to us. Lent in particular is a good time to reflect on whether we are living as citizens of the Kingdom of God, conforming our wills to the way that God has taught us to live through the Gospel of Christ, or whether we are conforming ourselves to the standards of our own culture, where bigger is better, too much is never enough, and the accumulation of material things is the highest good.

Discussion Questions

During this season of Lent, how is your relationship with earthly things being transformed?

What do you think Paul is referring to by "the example you have in us?"

Luke 13:31-35

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.' "

Commentary from Matthew Sanaker

In this part of Luke's gospel, we hear Jesus accept that his prophetic ministry will lead to his own death. In this exchange with the Pharisees, his words are both prophetic and poetic. The hen attempts to gather her chicks beneath her wings, while the fox seeks to devour both the chicks and the hen. Herod may be plotting to execute Jesus, but Herod is also killing the people of Israel through political and economic oppression. Jesus knows that he is headed toward Jerusalem, and like many prophets before him, he will die at the hands of those in power. He will be killed by those who refuse to hear the message from God to turn back from following their own ways, wielding power unjustly, oppressing the people, and neglecting the poor, the widows, and the orphans. There are those in power and those made complicit by going along with them rather than turning to follow the prophet.

Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:26, saying "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.'" Psalm 118 is a song of victory and salvation for those who put their trust in God rather than mortals. It is the song of one asking God to open the gates of righteousness, one who finds their salvation in God. He quotes verse 22 elsewhere: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." He knows that he will be rejected by Herod, the chief priests, and the scribes, and sent to the cross, but he also knows that "on the third day [he will finish his] work." Through the cross and the resurrection, he will bring salvation for all who seek God's righteousness.

Discussion Questions

Are there times when Jesus was trying to gather you under his wings, but you were unwilling to turn and follow him?

In preparation for Easter, how are you asking God to open the gates of righteousness and salvation in your life?

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