

# Worship-at-home

March 13, 2022

Second Sunday of Lent

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## “Of what can we be certain?”

### God calls us to worship:

The Lord is our light and our salvation:  
**Of whom shall we be afraid?**

The Lord is the stronghold of our life:  
**We will wait for the Lord in faithfulness.**

Let us seek the Lord’s face in this time of worship:  
**We will honour God’s presence in our prayers and our praises!**

### We offer our prayers:

God ever creating, ever loving, ever leading:  
when things around us feel chaotic, you are peace.  
When so much we hear is not reliable, your word is truth.  
When we are paralyzed by fear and anxiety, your presence is freedom.  
When we feel bereft and helpless, your love gives us hope.  
God, you are the Source of all that matters.  
We bring you our prayers and our praise this day,  
for you reveal yourself to us in the goodness of creation,  
in the love and mercy of Christ, your beloved,  
and through the energy and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.  
We worship you, O God,  
ever Three and ever One, world without end. Amen.

**Merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed.  
We have not loved you  
with our whole heart and mind and strength;  
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.  
In your mercy forgive what we have been,  
amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be,  
so that we may delight in your will  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your holy name.  
Amen.**

**God offers us the assurance of grace:**

Friends in Christ, while it is true that we have all sinned,  
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love  
poured out in Jesus Christ.

To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say, in Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven.  
Be at peace with God, with yourself, and with one another.

And give thanks to the Lord,  
for He is good.  
His love endures forever!

**We offer God our lives and resources:**

**God speaks through the written Word:**

**Hymn:** #15 "The Lord's my light"

Of what can we be certain?

READ GENESIS 15  
PSALM 27

**We:** What we believe about ourselves, God, other people will often affect how we react emotionally to changing circumstances. This in turn effects what we do: what we say and how we say it – with sarcasm or with grace, what we think and how we think, what we communicate with our body language, and what we do.

What we believe effects how we react emotionally to changing circumstances which effects what we do, think, say, and our body language.

If you believe that governments are essentially good: duly elected and have the best interests of the citizens in mind; that when they make decisions they are doing so for the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people, then when your circumstances change because they've enacted a new law/mandate/restriction, you're more likely to react with a sense of acceptance, of understanding, of trust. In consequence, you're more likely to obey the new law.

If you believe that governments are good and that they have the best interests of the citizens in mind, then when they change the speed limit from 80 to 75, you're likely to respond to that with trust and you're more likely to drive 75.

If, on the other hand, you believe that governments are intrinsically corrupt; that they are looking out for their own interests and wish to control the populace for their own gain, then when they impose a new law/restriction, you're likely to react with hostility, frustration and that in turn will cause you to be less likely to obey the new law. Or, if you do, you are more likely to do so grudgingly – with eye rolls and shoulder shrugs.

What we believe effects how we react emotionally, which effects what we do – what we think, say, and body language.

Belief effects emotions which effect thoughts and actions.

**God:** Abram believed that the Lord was good. That the Lord had Abram's and his descendants' best interests in mind. That the Lord was trustworthy. That the Lord would be true to the promises that He made.

Abram believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Abram was also confused. God had made a promise of a great family tree, yet, there was still no sign of that tree's roots. So, Abram assumed he would have to adopt one of his servants and make him his heir (a practice that was not uncommon in the Ancient Near Eastern World.)

To give Abram the assurance he needed, the Lord instructed Abram to bring a 3-year-old heifer, a 3-year-old female goat, a 3-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.

In the ancient near eastern world, when a king granted land to someone, the transfer was enacted in a *covenant*. To seal the covenant, it was customary that an animal(s) would be slaughtered and cut in two and the two parties would walk between the animal halves. The symbolism of this act is that, should either party fail to keep their promises, their fate would be like that of the animal's.

The Lord asked Abram to procure these animals and cut them in two. Each of the animal species mentioned is elsewhere described as acceptable for the temple sacrifices. The fact that all of the acceptable sacrificial animals are here represented could point to the totality and finality of this covenant cutting ceremony.

In any event, to assure Abram that He was trustworthy and that Abram's belief was not in vain, the Lord had Abram prepare this covenant cutting ceremony.

After he prepared the blood path and spent several hours driving away vultures, Abram fell asleep.

After the initial preparation, the entire ceremony took place while Abram slept.

While he slept, like a loving parent reassuring their child at night, the Lord God spoke to him and reassured him that all the promises were trustworthy.

While Abram slept, the Lord passed between the animal pieces. Not once, but twice. A smoking fire pot and then a flaming torch.

While Abram slept, the Lord God enacted a covenant in which He promised Abram protection, offspring, and land.

Now, remember: in a covenant cutting ceremony, the overlord and the vassal would *both* pass between the animal pieces to signify that the blessings and the curses applied to each equally.

In this scenario, the Lord God passed between the pieces twice, to signify that He was taking upon Himself both His responsibility and that of Abram's.

In essence, the Lord God demonstrated that should either Abram or Himself fail to keep the terms of the covenant, *He* would be like the dismembered animals.

**We:** This might seem like irrelevant ancient history. We don't ratify agreements by cutting animals in half anymore!

But think about what this teaches us about the character of the God we worship in Jesus of Nazareth.

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*While Abram slept, God alone passed through the animals.*

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As the story unfolds and we get to know Abram's descendants, we learn that they didn't always behave in ways that one might call *righteous*. Their actions didn't always suggest a profound trust in the goodness, grace, and mercy of the real and able God.

Abram himself was led to act in response to faulty beliefs on more than one occasion. In fact, in the very next chapter, we read of Abram's and Sarai's conclusion that, although they believed in the Lord, they also believed – falsely – that they had to take matters into their own hands to speed the Lord's plan. From their perspective, God wasn't acting in an appropriate amount of time. Failing to wait for the Lord, Abram abused his position of authority, impregnated Sarai's servant Hagar and cast her out to fend for herself. (By the way, if you read Genesis 16, you'll also learn that after this event, the Lord's angel found Hagar and cared for her and gave her an inheritance of her own.)

Throughout his story, each time Abram failed to first come before the Lord in prayer and worship, his decisions were poor. Because his actions in these circumstances were in consequence of false beliefs held alongside true beliefs.

This is the human story. We are on journeys of faith.

We all hold false beliefs alongside of the true beliefs. Part of maturing as a follower of Jesus is learning to discern between the two before we act.

The assurance the Lord gave to Abram in the covenant, he did without Abram's input.

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*While Abram slept, God alone passed through the animals.  
Twice.*

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God bound Himself to satisfy the covenant in its fullness.

“Know this for certain”, said the Lord, “That although your offspring will see suffering and oppression; that although they will not always walk with me, they *shall* come back here.”

Jesus is a descendant of Abram through the family tree of his adopted earthly father, Joseph. Those who believe Jesus is the Unique Son of God and Messiah, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and, by the Spirit's bond, are united with Christ into that ancient family tree.

By God's grace, Christians – even Gentile Christians – number among the countless stars witnessed by Abram.

The promise God made to Abram holds for everyone who believes the Lord is real, good, able, and trustworthy.

His is a love that wilt not let us go!  
Of that we can be certain.

**You:** During this season of Lent, I'm focusing on the action of turning to the Lord.

Last week, we looked at turning to the Lord for real-time refuge and I introduced a “Sacred Space” exercise in which, by yielding your imagination to the Holy Spirit, you can encounter the Lord's sheltering presence in the privacy of your mind's eye wherever you are and whatever is going on.

During this second week of Lent, I add to that the action of turning to the Lord as the source of your assurance that the world is not going to hell in a handbasket, but rather, in Christ, by his cross, to the Resurrected Eden; the new and eternal Promised Land.

“Know this for certain, that your offspring shall come back here and I will give this land.”

In Christ, you are part of that offspring, and that land extends to the whole of the created world!

The psalmist expressed this sure and certain hope well:

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*

If that forms the core of your belief system, of whom shall you be afraid?

If that forms the core of your belief system, you'll be better positioned to react to changing circumstances calmly and thus think, speak, and behave in ways that decrease the general feeling of anxiety and point instead to the One whose life is the light of the world.

Abram's belief was not a vague belief in the goodness of the universe, but a profound trust in the living, personal, relatable God.

Such a trust is fostered in past encounters as you look back and connect the dots in your lives to realize the places where God has provided you refuge, strength, and resources. Ultimately, it can only be fostered in encounters.

Mother Theresa is quoted as saying:

Peace is the fruit of service,  
service is the fruit of love,  
love is the fruit of faith,  
faith is the fruit of prayer,  
prayer is the fruit of silence.

The belief that promotes loving action moving toward peace is a trust in a living person fostered in prayerful encounters where all voices but the Lord's are silenced.

During this season, learn to turn to the Lord for refuge in your imagined – but not imaginary – sacred space in the privacy of your mind.

During this season, seek the Lord also in prayer and praise. Turn to Him for assurance that you shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. And trust Him to direct your thoughts, reactions, and actions in ways that point to His light. Amen.

**Hymn:** #209 "O Love that wilt not let me go"

**We respond in prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:**

**God sends us with God's blessing:**

**Hymn:** #637 "Take my life, and let it be consecrated"

**Blessing**

**Choral Amen**