

## **Worship Service for February 28<sup>th</sup>: 2nd Sunday in Lent**

- **Old Testament:** Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
- **New Testament:** Mark 8:31-38
- **Psalms:** Psalm 22:23-31

### **Announcements:**

- Welcome to our worship service! We're glad you are reading. We pray that God's blessings and peace will be with you all now and forever! Amen.
- Bible study will resume on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Time: 7pm; Place: St. David's. We will be studying James 1.

### **Sermon: Set Your Hearts On God's Plan**

Last week our passages were about covenants and we learned that covenants could be made between two individuals, between nations, between kings and their subjects and between a superior power and a lesser one. We saw how God made a covenant with Noah and his family and all living things on the earth, both humans and animals.

This week in our Old Testament passage, we see God making a covenant not with the entire world but with an individual – Abram. God promised to increase Abram's descendants if he would walk faithfully and blamelessly before Him. Remember one of those things we said about covenants was that it came with promises and obligations for the two parties involved. Abram's obligation here was to walk before God faithfully and blamelessly and God's part of the bargain was to bless him with numerous descendants.

We should note that at this stage of Abram's life, at ninety years old, Abram didn't have any kids. And God promised to make Him a father of many nations. Eventually, God will go on not only to bless Abram with a child, but also to change his name from Abram to Abraham. Abram means "exalted father", but the name Abraham means "father of a multitude." And Sarai his wife whose name meant princess was changed to Sarah which means princess of many. They did follow God, not blamelessly because at one point they got tired of waiting for God's promises and sort for a solution through their maid. But that didn't stop God from keeping His own side of the bargain. God remains faithful even in our faithlessness.

In the New Testament, we experienced God's covenant proclamation concerning Jesus Christ when he was being baptized. And now Jesus reveals to us his obligations in that covenant. He must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

This doesn't sit well with Peter and he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. The one he looked upon as the conquering king was declaring that he was going to be a sacrificial lamb. Peter struggled with this reality because that meant he too would have to go through the cross.

After rebuking Peter openly, Jesus realizes that he needs to unveil the destiny of the disciples and of the church. He says to them "If you truly want to follow me, you should at once completely disown your own life. And you must be willing to share my cross and experience it as your own, as you continually surrender to my ways. <sup>35</sup> *For if you let your life go for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, you will continually experience true life. But if you choose to keep your life for yourself, you will forfeit what you try to keep.* <sup>36</sup> *For what use is it to gain all the wealth and power of this world, with everything it could offer you, at the cost of your own life?* <sup>37</sup> *And what could be more valuable to you than your own soul?"*

Jesus' message to his disciples and to us is that God's ultimate good doesn't necessarily guarantee comfort and easy living for Christians. As disciples of Christ, we have to surrender completely to God. Sometimes, this will mean forgoing the things that we love to do or the familiar to thread in uncomfortable waters. We will therefore be required to make choices. For Jesus it was sacrificing his life on the cross and being raised back to life on the third day. Jesus had to trust God that he will be resurrected on the third day.

We too will have to make a choice. Clearly there are two ways to choose from. Either we insist on holding onto our lives and losing it or we choose to die to self and live in Christ. Dying to self might mean turning the other cheek, standing with people who are struggling, loving those who do not love us, weeping with those who weep, praying not for an easier life but for strength to bear the challenges we face. We might have to sacrifice our personal ambitions and forget our own comforts.

We will not get it right all the time. Abram and Sarai did not. Sarai lost faith at one point and tried to find solutions to her problems by herself. We too would find ourselves in positions of compromise sometimes. However, if we are willing to let go of self, to release our firm grip on our own ambitions and die with Christ, he will resurrect us to a life of grace and mercy and glory.

Let us therefore be encouraged today knowing that the Holy Spirit is there to help us in our struggles and to mould us into good disciples of Christ. Amen.

### **Prayers**

Loving God, we thank you for the vision you have for our lives, the promises you have made to us, and the journey you open before us. Today we remember with gratitude:

The ways our lives are held secure in uncertain times by our trust in you; moments in these months of pandemic that made us laugh or smile; moments when we felt your gifts of courage and patience; times when you helped us overcome temptation; the people who love us and give us encouragement.

Gracious God, we are grateful for all these signs of your love in our lives.

Thank you for the hope they bring us. Show us how to share this hope and love with others who are struggling in these difficult days.

Faithful God, we pray for healing and restoration in the world that is our home.

Hear us as we name in silence the needs and concerns we carry today: We pray for people, places and situations deeply in need of your grace, especially as they face the fears and frustrations of coping with COVID-19. We pray for those who struggle to feed, clothe or house themselves and their families, and all those who worry about their economic future. We pray for those who are weak or vulnerable for any reason, and for all who lack dignity and respect in our community.

We pray for the earth and its well-being, that areas and species under threat will be cared for. We pray for peace with justice in regions of the world facing turmoil and we pray for all those offering leadership and service in these times of hope and anxiety, for those planning how to offer vaccines in our community, and for those uncertain about vaccination.

Oh, God of love, power and faithfulness, we journey with your son, ever closer to Jerusalem, to his cross his true destiny. We hear his words "Take up your cross and follow me," but we aren't sure if it's the crosses of this life, or the actual cross of death. We hear his words, "deny yourself," and wonder which self it is; the self we put on for others, or the self centered self that wants it all for ourselves? Whichever it is, it seems like Jesus sure is asking a lot of us and we aren't sure we can do this.

God we will need your holy spirit to be able to do this. God we will need your grace and mercy to be able to do this. We remember that you empowered your disciples, the early Christians, and others who decided to follow you, we believe that you will do likewise for us.

By the power of your Spirit, O God, work in us and through us. May we bring the light and love of your kingdom into our relationships and our community in all we do and say. Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray in these words:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Benediction**

May God the Father who gives life to the world grant you grace to be faithful in the service of his Kingdom. May God the Son who walked the way of obedience, suffering and death grant you grace to live his life and proclaim his glory. May God the Holy Spirit who strengthens the people of God grant you grace to hold lightly and give generously of all that has been entrusted to you in this world. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.