

Sermon for 28 February 2021 @ Bethesda UMChurch/Baltimore 21214

Second Sunday of Lent

Scriptures: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22: 23-31; Roman 4:13-25; Mark 8 :31-38

« ***This generation...*** »

A friend the other day used the term “Covid fatigue.” We were comparing experiences of being confused, making mistakes, lacking energy for ordinary tasks.

We seem to be disoriented often, whether I take a wrong turn driving to a familiar location, or someone I know is working from home gives me unclear answers when I call for information or to provide answers to a request in the mail or over the internet.

I thought of that when I sat down to write this sermon and came to the phrase Jesus used when telling his disciples they must hold fast to their faith and purpose “in this adulterous and sinful generation.”

Was he having a bad day? Was Mark reflecting the disappointment and confusion of the disciples at his telling them “quite openly” of the loss and horror he headed towards?

As much as I hold onto, and believe, in the potential promise of all this chaos we are experiencing ... the mail doesn't come when or to where it should, the schools don't, and then do, plan to open, the vaccine is so incredibly produced and then its distribution sounds like a Marx Brothers comedy routine ... and over it all hangs the blaming and insulting and soul-searing flavor of much of our talk and our news.

It's not easy to believe in the positive outcome of great transition.

Surely, however, that is a big part of our Lenten study and prayer this year. The first lesson for today, as with Noah and the rainbow last Sunday, describes Abram ... now Abraham ... and Sarai ... now Sarah ... and their experience of the promise of God at the bottom of things, if they will accept and cooperate. They will be crucial characters in the developing relationship between God the creator and many strands of humankind. After all, we say Jews, Christians, and Muslims ... together a significant portion of contemporary religious people ... are all members of the Abrahamic tradition.

Psalm 22, which we Christians identify with Jesus' cry on the Cross, “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?” from its deeply plaintive first section, today speaks the language of hope coming out of despair that so powerfully uplifts its second half. “All the ends of the earth shall remember, and turn to the Lord,” verse 27 insists. So many times scripture allows us to pray both despair and hope. We know it's true: Facing the dark is the first step towards regaining courage and, eventually, a wisdom for the rest of our times, again and again.

In Romans, Paul returns to the Abraham and Sarah symbolism. The very power to believe God's promise of greater purpose came from beyond to this couple. At work behind their own doing,

God's loving plan began to emerge, as their willingness itself responded and expanded. Not on their own, yet not without their cooperation, history went forward.

All this is mystical, and we come to awareness of grace in our own experience without being able to put it together except over time. Thus the attention our religious routine gives us to these stories, with all their unique twists and turns, can be useful in different ways from year to year. This year, chaos and uncertainty beyond anything we can remember have to be borne, faced, worked through. Certainly the love of God for all creation is demanding to be faced and cooperated with in new ways. Working for new ways to express ourselves, so that hurt can come out and begin healing, and different points of view can be accepted without being allowed to deprive other viewpoints of consideration.... All with this understanding that winning isn't the goal; growth for all is; honoring of nature is the point, not obliterating and ignoring it; and the common good is fundamental to all careers and every condition .... Or we're all sunk and no sequel is possible to our moment of influence.

"This generation" is all we've got. We don't move on until we learn how to love what we have and who we are and with whom we are sharing time on the planet.

Let us give ourselves to learning how to pray and face, and hear and promise, and most of all, to love ourselves and each other, in all our forms, in this moment of Jesus' resurrected presence among us and all creation.

Amen.