

Sermon for 16 March 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Second Sunday in Lent

Scriptures: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalter: 758, Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 3:31-35

Sermon

Take your pick: Every one of today's Bible lessons offers tough, hard-driving approaches to whatever's on your plate.

Take the daily grind of another shut-down or ego-slam on our present National Executive Branch's part. You'll find traces of that attitude in each of today's texts. Get set: God tells Abram to lie down and wait, and Abram and Sarai will have descendants owning Egypt to the great River Euphrates, even though they have no children.

Read Psalm 27, and get enough promises of victory to satisfy Napoleon, Washington, Stalin, Putin and the scariest first-grader trying to memorize the alphabet.

Listen to Paul telling how to let the Spirit keep the weakest congregation alive and brave.

And when some kindly, worried Jewish Pharisees urge Jesus to leave town to escape Herod's plan to kill him ... hear Jesus say, "I've got a job to do, and after it's done, it doesn't matter what happens."

How to behave in hard times, indeed!

Is that what church is all about? Winning? Following a human leader?

We've got a President who says that, day after day, to crowds who cheer and testify just like it's all set.

And we've got thousands of people losing jobs, and government jobs our representatives, the U.S. Congress, set up decade after decade, to do what seemed decent and important on behalf of our power and position in the modern world.

Johns Hopkins says it plans to abolish 2,000 jobs. The U.S. Post Office director expects to eliminate 10,000 positions.

And all this turns into a whirlwind of confusion and blame, fear and anger all over our country and far beyond where we have tried constructively to solve problems and feed people and ... and the whole world is topsy-turvy right now.

Good thing we're in Lent. Right? When you work on the hard things. And on Easter morning God comes through. Right?

There's only one thing wrong with this picture.

We're not in charge.

Sooner or later, maybe just in bits and pieces for awhile, we're going to find ourselves working for the Lord who insists on equality, and says nothing's as important as feeding the poor and healing the sick, and not even knowing who's got money because everyone has enough or soon will ... and because we treat each other well, like we want to be treated.

What else have we to say? What's the point if it's not that, sooner or later, and we wake up to that, and live and die according to that?

That's Lent, my beloved friends and partners. This is the boat we're sailing.

With Jesus.

Take heart. Be of good cheer. "I have overcome the world."

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Addendum to 16 March 2025 sermon: After saying "Amen," I detailed my attendance at the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's concert 15 March honoring Duke Ellington, and we sang his "Come Sunday" from page 728 in the 1989 UMHymnal, making the point that much progress is being made in many directions of human relations even in the midst of all the disarray my sermon describes.