

Church of the Divine Love

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

February 28, 2021 10:15 A.M.

Morning Prayer, Rite I

All pages refer to The Book of Common Prayer

Opening Hymn #401 – The God of Abraham (vs. 1-3)

Opening Sentences for Lent page 38

Confession of Sin page 41

The Invitatory and Psalter page 42

Venite page 44

The First Lesson: **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

The Psalm Appointed: **Psalms 22:22-30**

The Second Lesson: **Romans 4:13-25**

Gradual Hymn #473 – Lift high the cross

The Gospel Lesson: **Mark 8:31-38**

The Sermon

Welcome and Announcements

Offertory Hymn #675 – Take up your cross

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The Lord's Prayer page 54

The Suffrages page 55

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For Strength and Confidence page 459

#49 – For the Aged page 830

#47 – For Young Persons page 829

#62 – Prayer of St. Francis page 833

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Dismissal page 59

Dismissal Hymn #677 – God moves in a mysterious way (vs. 1,2,4,6)

Sermon Sunday February 28, 2021

Genesis 17: 1-7,15-16; Psalm 22: 22-30; Romans 4: 13-25; Mark 8: 31-38

GOD TRANSFORMATIVE PROMISES.

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

Today is the second Sunday in the Lent season. As we contemplate Christ's act of salvation on the cross of Calvary, we are called to do a reality check on our Christian lives. We are challenged to look at our lives through the lens of God's values. We are invited to pause and reflect on God's will for our lives. The renaming of Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah is part of a restating in renewed form of God's covenant with Abraham which first appeared in Genesis 12, then Genesis 15.

Our God is a promise maker, and a promise keeper. And that can become the source of our joy! Today, in the Book of Genesis, we encounter Abram and Sarai, and they have heard powerful promises from God. Their amazing story begins in Genesis 12. Abram is 75 years old when God directs him to pack up his wife, family, and portable possessions, to follow God wherever God leads. And as part of that invitation to leave the familiar to undertake this adventure, God makes an astounding promise to Abram and Sarai. They have never had any children. Yet God promises that they will become the parents of a nation. What a promise! This couple was barren up to this point, yet now God declares: "Your descendants will be numerous." We would assume that such a promise would bring them joy. In Chapter 13, God repeats his promise: "I will make your descendants so numerous that they cannot be counted! In Chapter 15 – God's promise becomes a covenant. Abram wonders if perhaps one of his servants will inherit everything. So, God repeats the promise again... "your descendants will be numerous, like the stars in the sky." God keeps promising. "You will have children. I will make this happen." But in chapter 16, Abram and Sarai appear to be dissatisfied with God's timing. You can almost picture them looking up to heaven and saying, "We're not getting any younger, you know!" True, God has repeated his promise over and over again. But they decide to take matters into their own hands. Sarai encourages Abram to be intimate with her maidservant, Hagar. That's certainly one way to have a child. God's promises are beyond our manipulation. What could go wrong with that plan? So, God has to intervene. And... once again! ... God repeats his promise to Abram and Sarai. You will have numerous descendants! Which brings us to the passage that we read on this second Sunday of Lent. And if I asked you to guess what God is up to in this chapter, by now you would probably get the right answer. Yes! God, once again, makes a covenant promise to Abram and Sarai. You WILL have a child! Your descendants WILL be numerous. I promise. I really promise. The living God makes transformative promises to Abram and Sarai in today's passage. God says: I am God almighty. I will make my covenant with you. This is my covenant – I have made you, and I shall make you, the ancestor of a multitude of nations, you will be fruitful, and Sarai shall bear a son Such beautiful, transformative promises. All the more remarkable because God has been making these promises, repeating these promises, over and over again since chapter 12. But this time, in chapter 17, Abram and Sarai are so transformed by their encounter with this promise-making, promise-keeping God, that they are apparently changed to the core of their being. How do I know? Because their names are changed! So often in the Bible, when

someone has a life-changing encounter with the living God, their names get changed. In the Biblical world, your name represents your identity and your destiny. This leads us to our Gospel reading today.

This passage comes immediately after the watershed moment in Mark's gospel when Peter confirms Jesus as the Messiah (8.29). Until that point, the gospel has been concerned with demonstrating the power of Jesus through his teaching and (particularly healing) miracles. From this point onwards, Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem and the suffering he must and will endure there. And in this passage, Jesus immediately widens out the fact that he will suffer, to the fact that anyone who would follow him will suffer too. In Peter's rebuke of Jesus' words that he must suffer (v.32, 33), Jesus says 'Get behind me Satan!' This might hint at a link with Jesus' temptations for it hits on the same challenge at Jesus: will he just abuse his earthly power and authority for his own selfish benefit and self-protection, or will he submit to God's will to use it to save and redeem the world, at the cost of his own suffering? The fact that Jesus summons the crowd to hear his next teaching (v.34), rather than telling his disciples to keep it secret, emphasizes that this next teaching is at the core of Jesus' message, which he knows must be promoted hard because of the obvious unpopularity of self-sacrifice before the equally important but easier to hear message of humanity knowing it is loved and cared for. By using the shocking symbol of the cross the execution device for a condemned criminal, Jesus is making clear how deep this suffering will be, at the same time emphasizing that it is pointless unless it is for the sake of the gospel.

All the readings today show how living a life faithful to our true human call and God's purposes are neither always immediately obvious, nor will it avoid suffering, in fact, it will necessarily lead to our suffering. But paradoxically, it is through that way of life that we will experience the more deeply fulfilled life which will see us sharing in the life of eternity with God. For Abraham and Sarah, the idea of becoming ancestors of many peoples seemed impossible. But it was precisely their faith to carry on, in the face of all the facts, that God honored and has indeed placed at the heart of the way to live in line with God's way.

The way of Christ, self-denial, reminds us that our life is not our own. It belongs to God. It reminds us that we are not in control, God is. Our life is not about us. It is about God. There is great freedom in knowing these things. We are free to be fully alive. Through self-denial our falling down becomes rising up, losing is saving, and death is resurrection. If we believe our life is about us, we will continue to exercise power over others, try to save ourselves, control our circumstances, and maybe even rebuke Jesus. Jesus rarely exercised power over others or tried to control circumstances. He simply made different choices. Self-denial is not about being out of control or powerless. It is about the choices we make. Jesus chose to give in a world that takes, to love in a world that hates, to heal in a world that injures, to give life in a world that kills. He offered mercy when others sought vengeance, forgiveness when others condemned, and compassion when others were indifferent. He trusted God's abundance when others said there was not enough.

As we move deeper into the Lenten season, it is my hope and my prayer that you will take seriously the call that first came to you in your baptism, a call that hopefully takes on greater meaning as you make decisions and order the priorities of your life. But this is a challenge to us to live faithfully now, and trust God will also act beyond our imaginings in due time. We must learn not be limited by our own lack of imagination, as Paul challenged the Romans. Almighty God, by the prayer and discipline of Lent may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings, and by following in his Way come to share in his glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen!**

Prayer for Grace and Favor:

Dear God, we ask that you provide for our needs, we ask for your grace and favor. We pray for your blessings to cover us; we pray that you would help us to prosper and make every plan that you have birthed in our heart to succeed.

We pray that others would take notice of your goodness and could not help but say, "these are the ones that the Lord has blessed." Shine your light in us, through us.

May we make a difference in this world, for your glory and purposes. Set your way before us. May all your plans succeed. We may reflect your peace and hope to a world that so desperately needs your presence and healing.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

PARISH PRAYER LIST

Barbara Curran	Irene	Edward Lent
Dina Palkowski	Warren	Kate Jones
Frances & Donna Mongelli	Marricco Family	Del
Nathan Treadwell	Margaret	Girard Bishop
Tyler Gorman	Bernie Walther	
Chris Dickson	Susan Hanaway	The departed:
Michael Echevarria	Kim	Matt Marricco
Warren	Rachael	
Michael & Family	Caesar	
Martinisi Family	Bill Conklin	
Lois Kessler	Anthony Paribello	
Kathleen		

Children who are ill:

Christopher and his family	Clara Berbeck
Franklin Tenesaca	Gabriel
Aidan	

