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| **The Lessons Appointed for Use on the** | http://www.lectionarypage.net/Art/Newshield.gif |
| Second Sunday in Lent |
| Year BRCL |

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Romans 4:13-25

Mark 8:31-38

Psalm 22:22-30

**The Collect**

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.*Amen.*

**Old Testament**

**Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

**The Response**

**Psalm 22:22-30**

***Deus, Deus meus***

22 Praise the Lord, you that fear him; \*
stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel;
all you of Jacob's line, give glory.

23 For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty;
neither does he hide his face from them; \*
but when they cry to him he hears them.

24 My praise is of him in the great assembly; \*
I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.

25 The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
and those who seek the Lord shall praise him: \*
"May your heart live for ever!"

26 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, \*
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

27 For kingship belongs to the Lord; \*
he rules over the nations.

28 To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship; \*
all who go down to the dust fall before him.

29 My soul shall live for him;
my descendants shall serve him; \*
they shall be known as the Lord'S for ever.

30 They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn \*
the saving deeds that he has done.

**The Epistle**

**Romans 4:13-25**

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

**The Gospel**

**Mark 8:31-38**

Jesus began to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

God’s call is strong, God’s call is daunting, God’s call is unrelenting. God’s call doesn’t make us perfect or even make us want to do the right things. God’s call is what it is, an invitation to be in relationship with God— an invitation to love God, to believe in God… to have faith that God is.

We may wish that when we hear God’s call and follow it, that it would make us better, more moral, and you might think from Paul’s letter to Romans that that would be the case. Abraham when he believes in God and God’s promise, by Paul’s account, is reckoned to be righteous. I think Paul was writing in Romans from the big picture; some of Abraham’s behaviors are not what could be considered righteous. Remember that Abraham heard God, but didn’t believe God. You know he first slept with his slave concubine Hagar and had a child, Ishmael,with her, just to be on the safe side about an heir. He twice passes his wife off to others as his sister, because he doesn’t believe God’s promise and is scared he is going to be killed. He laughs and falls on his face when told he is going to have a child with Sarah. Faith… what faith is this? It’s the faith that involves doubt. It’s the faith that stays in relationship. It is the faith that moves when God says to move, It is the faith that attempts to kill the very boy Isaac, the heir, when God says to do so. It’s a complicated faith, but it is not an on-off switch… Abraham has faith and at the same time he doesn’t. He stays in relationship, he answers God’s call. He is not perfect.

We may wish that God’s call would cause us to be good disciples, to take up our cross and follow Jesus. Yes, Peter and the rest of the disciples, as is often the case in the Gospels, just don’t see things the way Jesus does. Peter has the nerve to rebuke Jesus. This faith in God in Jesus was unstoppable though. Yet, what Jesus projected, what he forecasted wasn’t what the disciples wanted. In 6 CE, 3000 insurrectionists were nailed to crosses to show that Rome meant business. Walking by this killing field as it were and then being told by Jesus to take up your cross and follow Jesus?! As much as we like to poke fun of the disciples and first followers for not “getting it.” Having seen 3000 people hanged on crosses … that made for a lot to overcome to pick up one’s cross and follow Jesus. Consciously to choose the path that may lead to your death and destruction is by no means an easy path. We wish to be able to be counted as one of those who could do that. The call of God is strong. Many have made that leap, many continue to do so. The call of God is strong and unrelenting. Even Peter, once called Satan, will become the rock who instead answers the strong call of God to pick up his cross and follow. He stays in relationship with Jesus. He is not perfect.

The call of God is still strong when there is grief or when there feels like there is no God. You may remember that the beginning of the psalm we read this morning— psalm 22, is what Jesus cries from the cross, “Eli Eli, lama sabachthani?—-My God, my God, why have you deserted me?” Doubt is part of the picture. Knowing there is a God to whom to cry and who listens is part of the picture. We don’t want to be there, in the pit of doubt, but we will be. Still the call of God is strong.

Through times in history, civil unrest in our own country, during slavery, and Jim Crow segregation, through apartheid in South Africa, through gas chambers of the Nazis, through all war atrocities all around the world in past and present, there are times when faith is tested over and over again. Still the call of God is strong, it doesn’t matter where in the world it is. In our current setting, 2018 in the United States, there is much wrong, among the many things that are good. There are acts of violence as in the recent school shooting that grieve us. And of course, gun violence is wrong; violence, in general, is wrong. And yet, not all gun owners are bad, not all politicians are bad. And we cry to God, “where are you when high school students are shot?”

God is with them. God has never left them.

Psalm 22 ….the beginning of the psalm is a lament that then turns to praise, which is the portion we read this morning. There is praise to God who is present for the unloved, the meek, the week, the ones on the receiving end of violence. We are left where we begun. We are called by God, we are called and the only adequate answer is to praise God. Believing and having faith in God even when things are God-awful, this “being in communion with God”, answering the strong call of God, when we like Abraham or Peter don’t do the right thing or we don’t know what to do. Answering causes us to praise God, because having faith and believing that God is, lets us know we are heard and lets us know that God is with us… and we too can be like Peter and Abraham, and stay in relationship and change the world for the good, picking up our crosses.

In the words of Thomas Merton, let us pray:

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”