

Sermon Notes from CMJ
Second Sunday in Lent - Year B

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

ACNA Readings - Genesis 22:1-14; Psalm 16; Romans 8:31-39; Mark 8:31-38

Introduction - We begin our second week of self-examination and reflection in our preparation for Easter. Spiritual disciplines are biblical practices, with fasting being only one form of spiritual discipline. The motivation for spiritual discipline should not be one of legalism, that is the feeling “I must do this,” but rather a heartfelt desire for a closer relationship and walk with the Lord.

Common Theme - The walk of faith is most often not glamorous nor easy nor void of difficulties. The invitation of the Messiah is to join in the sufferings of Christ. The reward for doing so reveals the paradox. The cross ends in glory. In journeying with Jesus into his death, we also receive the blessings of his resurrection and life. With this recognition of the paradox, we look at our readings prescribed for the Second Sunday in Lent.

Hebraic Perspective - When Abram first appears in the Bible, he has no background and no early life stories. We know so very little about him. What we think we know is largely attributed to oral tradition. What we do know about Abram is that all he has is quickly stripped away from him. Abram is removed from his land, his culture and his extended family. As Abram surrenders the life that he has known, he develops a personal relationship with the Living God. The name change to Abraham, in conjunction with his circumcision and his entry into a covenant with God, marked a profound turning point in his life. Up until this point, Abraham had been focused on his personal spiritual relationship with the Lord; however, from this point on Abraham begins to grasp that his walk with the Lord will affect not just his immediate family but the nations of the world. Our personal journeys might seem small and perhaps insignificant to us, but in Jewish tradition, they can always affect the world. He who saves but one life is as if he has saved the whole universe (Talmud).

First Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 - The passage opens with God’s call to Abram to walk faithfully before the Lord and to be blameless. The call of God never leaves us in the same position or state that we were in before the call. God calls Abram to be תָּמִים (*tammim*), which can be translated as perfect or blameless. It usually has a ritual or sacrificial connotation. Likewise, Jesus also calls us to be “perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48). Having taken his identity, his culture and land, God was beginning to give Abraham a new sense of who he was with a new name, a new people, a new purpose and family. This is a common biblical paradox: we give up to get a closer walk with God, with the result having the potential to affect not only those around us but creation itself.

Second Reading: Psalm 22:22-30 - Psalm 22 is usually best known for the opening verse, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jewish tradition cites David as the composer but

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also inserts these words into the prayer of Queen Esther as she interceded for the Jewish people against the threat of wicked Haman (Tractate Megillah, Babylonian Talmud). The psalm acknowledges that God is attentive to those in distress and that he listens to the poor. We should take notice of that fact, especially in our dealings with those around us. The promise is that the poor will indeed “eat and be satisfied,” and this will somehow have an influence on the entire world as Psalm 22:27 notes: “All the ends of the earth shall remember the Lord.” Lent is not only a time of traditionally abstaining from something but also a time to notice and give more to the poor.

Third Reading: Romans 4:13-25 - One of the issues Paul had to address to the Roman community, which was a blend of Jewish and Gentile disciples, was the issue of circumcision. Some were convinced that physical circumcision was required to be “blameless” before the Lord, as the Torah instructs. Paul argues convincingly that the call to be blameless actually came before the command for circumcision and thus is available to all nations. Paul argues that just as Jewish people ought to follow the Torah out of the same believing faith of Abraham, the Gentiles also are all called to walk in the same faith as Abraham who believed before circumcision. The proof for all of this is the resurrection of the Messiah, the King of both Jews and Gentiles.

Fourth Reading: Mark 8:31-38 - The Gospel passage tells us that Jesus begins to “speak openly” about his death. This plain teaching shook the messianic expectations of the disciples. Redemption and God’s Kingdom meant the overthrow of the oppressor, or so they expected. We then see Peter do something that no disciple should ever do to his rabbi: tell the Master what to do! Jesus tells us what to do; we should never presume to tell Jesus what to do. And Peter is rightly rebuked for his audacity. Too often our prayer life reflects our desire to inform Jesus of his messianic agenda and how he is going to impact our lives. During this season of Lent, we should take the opportunity to humble ourselves while we journey with Jesus to Easter and to accept that the invitation of the Gospel is the invitation of the cross.

Hebraic Context - Paradoxical sayings, like the one we see in the Gospel passage, were part and parcel of the Jewish world of late antiquity. Jewish wisdom teaching discussed deep truths through the mystery of paradox. Jesus challenges both the messianic expectation of the disciples and the path of discipleship. The journey of salvation is one of self-sacrifice and not one of constant prosperity or glorious conquest of demons, thrones, and powers. To save your life you lose it. You give up something to gain something, and that is completely counter-cultural in today's world. To the secular world, this makes no sense. However, as disciples, we acknowledge the ultimate mystery that you cannot gain resurrection life without first dying.

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ACNA Addendum

Introduction - The lectionary readings for the ACNA carry the theme of father-son sacrifice with its universal and messianic implications, all linked by the path of obedience. Abraham and Isaac act in obedience as well as faith, as does Jesus himself. The call for the disciple of Jesus is to join, with the action of obedience, in the sufferings of the Messiah.

Genesis 22:1-14 - This well-known story carries within it so many truths, sermons, and applications for us as disciples of Jesus and as sons of Abraham. Abraham, who had been very vocal in his concern for God's justice of the righteous within the city of Sodom (Gen 19), now remains very silent at the command to sacrifice Isaac. Isaac, who is old enough to communicate and carry the wood, is also being tested as he easily could have disobeyed his father and fled the mountain. Both Abraham and Isaac participate obediently in the sacrifice and in the test. Because of his obedience, Isaac the son becomes a model of the willing martyr, willing to suffer on behalf of the faithful. The pattern is clear. As sons of Abraham, by faith, we too must be prepared to willingly suffer with and for the Messiah. The blessing is that we will always see that God provides.

Psalms 16 - This psalm contains an obscure title, "A Miktam of David." The meaning of this ancient Hebrew word is difficult to understand. The Septuagint (early Greek translation of the Bible) understood it to mean an inscription on stone. The psalm talks about the closeness of God, especially during times of trouble. It is a psalm of faith, and perhaps there is the implication of our faith in the Rock (Deut 32:4, cf. 1 Cor 10:4)! Psalm 16 is quoted in the Book of Acts as a prophecy for the resurrection of the Messiah. Though there be suffering in our lives, our faith is founded and inscribed on the Rock, and the future is certain in the eternal life of the risen Lord.

Romans 8:31-39 - The invitation of the Gospel is the invitation to join in the work, life, and kingdom of God and the Messiah. Looking at the incredible lengths to which God has gone to invite us into his kingdom – including the sacrifice of his son, also foreshadowed by Abraham – then who can possibly doubt that God is for us? Conversely, who can then be against us? The actual daily walk with Jesus might be arduous, will probably include an element of suffering, and most likely does not include the prosperity we think we want but don't really need. What we truly need is the love of God. Paul declares the good news that nothing that appears to be good nor appears to be evil can separate us from the love of God.

About the author: The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master's program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and

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