

Dia dhich. Ta an la feile Padraig! And that's probably enough Irish. I do wish you a happy St. Patrick's Day, but I'll preach in English. After all number 24 of our Articles of Religion states that prayers and teachings should be in a language "understood by the people."

Our first Lesson comes at a very low point in the life of the patriarch Abraham. He has had great success as a leader in war but he still has no son to be his heir. In this passage he is called **Ab** ram, or to give it a more Hebrew pronunciation, A **bvram**. The name means "exalted father," but a father he was not.

In this story the LORD appears to Abram in a vision and tells him, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." Abram responds, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" We have no idea who Eliezer of Damascus was or why he would be the heir, but in the next line Abram says that a slave born in his house will be the heir so maybe Eliezer is the head slave. The fact that he continues to be childless is depressing for Abram.

The LORD then takes Abram outside, shows him the stars and promises him that his descendants will be countless like the stars. Next we are told that Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness. Paul finds these to be very important words and he applies them to our belief in Jesus and his resurrection. Because we believe we are counted as righteous by God.

The remainder of the story details the creation of the covenant between the LORD and Abram and Abram's descendants. The animal sacrifices are brought, then cut in two and laid out. Abram spends the rest of the day chasing off the vultures. In the dark Abram falls into a deep sleep, then the LORD accepts the sacrifices by passing a smoking pot and a flaming torch between the pieces. This is an important detail because it authenticates the covenant established by cutting the sacrificial animals. Cutting the animals is how we humans initiate the covenant and God's response with the fire makes it effective. We might note that the Hebrew verb we translate as "make" in "make a covenant" really means "cut." We cut a covenant. This language also exists in English when we cut a deal on something, or cut another person into the deal we already have going.

There are a couple of things we can see in this story about dealing with depression. First the LORD reminds Abram of his promises, then he gives him a job to do. In dealing with depression it is important for us to remind or be reminded of the good things in our lives and the love of God, and then it is important to do something. Get busy doing something.

The Gospel tells of a time when Jesus might have been at a low point. The Pharisees warn him that he should flee because Herod wants to kill him. The Pharisees are usually shown as people who don't understand what Jesus is trying to teach and they often oppose him. This time they seem to be trying to help. They may not have understood what Jesus was trying to teach them but they did recognize he was in danger. Jesus answers them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.'" Jesus says that he is not intimidated but he will continue his ministry. The reference to today, tomorrow and the third day points to his crucifixion and resurrection, but that will not happen in Galilee. Jesus tells them, "Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem." Then Jesus laments over Jerusalem, "'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!'" There is deep longing and sorrow in these words. We need to consider whether we are the ones over whom Jesus now laments. Are we willing to be gathered into his protection?

In our second lesson Paul gives an unusual invitation, "Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us." He then tells of those who choose the ways of the world, "Their god is the belly." We are to be different. He says, "Our citizenship is in heaven." That brings expectations and hope. It is from there that our Savior will come to transform us. Paul's statement is bold, "join in imitating me." Perhaps a good Lenten question for us to study is whether or not our lives are examples that others should imitate.

I don't think there is any depression in what Paul writes, even though he includes the line, "For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears." But a theme that unites these lessons is a call for faithfulness. Do we believe God and do we trust God as Abraham did? Does that belief make a difference in our lives? Do we understand ourselves as being judged as righteous in God's eyes because of our belief? Are we willing to be gathered together by Christ Jesus as a hen gathers her brood? Would we rather he leave us alone? Because of our faith do we live lives that are worthy examples for others? Are we ready to do something because of our belief? Does our faith make a difference in the way we live each and every day? These are great questions for us to ponder as we continue our Lenten journey.

In Jesus' name. **Amen,**

Second Sunday in Lent

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.**

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 (NRSV) ¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ²But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." ⁴But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." ⁵He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness. ⁷Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." ⁸But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. ¹²As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. ¹⁷When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

Psalm 27

1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? * the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, * it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who stumbled and fell.

3 Though an army should encamp against me, * yet my heart shall not be afraid;

4 And though war should rise up against me, * yet will I put my trust in him.

5 One thing have I asked of the LORD; one thing I seek; * that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life;

6 To behold the fair beauty of the LORD * and to seek him in his temple.

7 For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe in his shelter; * he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling and set me high upon a rock.

8 Even now he lifts up my head * above my enemies round about me.

9 Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation with sounds of great gladness; * I will sing and make music to the LORD.

10 Hearken to my voice, O LORD, when I call; * have mercy on me and answer me.

11 You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." * Your face, LORD, will I seek.

The Rev. John L. Duncan

St. John's, Seacliff

- 12 Hide not your face from me, * nor turn away your servant in displeasure.
13 You have been my helper; cast me not away; * do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.
14 Though my father and my mother forsake me, * the LORD will sustain me.
15 Show me your way, O LORD; * lead me on a level path, because of my enemies.
16 Deliver me not into the hand of my adversaries, * for false witnesses have risen up against me, and also those who speak malice.
17 What if I had not believed that I should see the goodness of the LORD * in the land of the living!
18 O tarry and await the LORD'S pleasure; be strong, and he shall comfort your heart; * wait patiently for the LORD.

Philippians 3:17-4:1 (NRSV) . ¹⁷Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. ^{4:1}Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Luke 13:31-35 (NRSV) ³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³²He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"