

The Second Sunday in Lent
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by
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Genesis 12:1-4a; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17; Psalm 121

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer".

Beginning with the call of Abram in our first reading from Genesis where he was told to leave everything and follow God, the readings for today explore what it means to live by faith and to respond to God's call. Abram goes forth from his homeland and family and trusts that God will bless him and keep him. He embraces the call and this puts him in the right relationship with God. In the Epistle from Romans, we are told "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." The Lord's acceptance of him as righteous was not based on his performance but on his faith. God's grace is extended to all who share Abraham's faith. We have but to listen to God's call to us and follow his command.

The Psalm we read continues to reiterate this same theme of following God and trusting by faith. It asks the question, "from where is my help to come?" and the answer was "he who watches over you will not fall asleep...shall neither slumber nor sleep...The Lord himself watches over you...The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore." We have but to trust and have faith just as Abram did and we will receive our acceptance as righteous.

In the Gospel from John, we hear the story of Nicodemus coming to question Jesus in the middle of the night. Now Nicodemus was a powerful man—a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews, and a teacher in Israel—who came and told Jesus that he recognized him as indeed divinely commissioned. He even addresses Jesus as "Rabbi" which is a way of honoring him as one learned in the Torah. But Nicodemus persistently questions Jesus trying to learn how he can earn his way to heaven. He does not understand the answers Jesus tells him because they have their foundation in faith and not concrete measurable deeds. Jesus tells Nicodemus that "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit". This is to say that you must be sealed with water upon profession of belief and repentance of life during baptism. It is at our baptism that we receive the Holy Spirit into our body and become born again, sealed and marked by water and oil as Christ's own for ever. We don't hear what happened to Nicodemus after his discussion with Jesus that night, but we do learn later that it was Nicodemus who defended Jesus before the other Pharisees, and he was also the man who brought the spices to anoint the body of Jesus after the crucifixion. Whatever questions still remained with Nicodemus after his night visit, he did believe Jesus was sent by God even if he couldn't grasp the full understanding.

Many of our lives are very similar to that of Nicodemus. We too are intelligent, we're respected in our community, and we work hard to reach our goals. But do we choose to act as we do in an attempt to earn our way into heaven? Could we be one of those reality TV shows like Big Brother or Survivor where the players do whatever it takes to earn the final prize? They definitely work hard, sacrifice and challenge themselves both physically and mentally, and scheme and manipulate each other in their attempt to reach their optimum goal. Our goal as Christians is everlasting life in heaven, but do we search as Nicodemus did for worldly concrete ways to obtain it, do we work to obtain it as those on the reality shows do, or do we respond as Abram did and follow God's call no matter where it leads us? Lent is a time for reflection. It is not a time to be miserable because we are sinners and need penance. It is a time for renewal and refreshing our faith. We need to awaken our minds and hearts to God's calling to us as Abraham did. Let's open ourselves to whatever and wherever that calling will

take us knowing that He will always watch over us. Perhaps Lent could be a time for us to attend Bible study, participate in St. James Lenten study sessions, practice daily devotions and readings, or choose to try some spiritual contemplation individually, but whatever we each choose to do, we need to open our hearts and minds and let the Spirit speak to us.

Faith is what we are called to embody. During Jesus' baptism, the heavens opened up, the Holy Spirit descended, and God proclaimed that Jesus was his son. During our baptism, we received the Holy Spirit as our sins were washed and we were reborn as disciples of Christ. If you will turn to page 305 in the Book of Common Prayer, let us read and respond to the prayers said for the candidates being baptized starting in the middle of the page:

“Deliver us, O Lord, from the way of sin and death.
Open our hearts to your grace and truth.
Fill us with your holy and life-giving Spirit.
Keep us in the faith and communion of your holy Church.
Teach us to love others in the power of the Spirit.
Send us into the world in witness to your love.
Bring us to the fullness of your peace and glory.”

If we are to open our hearts and hear what the Lord is saying to us and follow his commandments, we will be able to fulfill these prayers and in doing so demonstrate our faith. Listen for God's Word to sweep over us without direction from us. Do not hold back, but allow the wind to take us to places not necessarily on our agenda. What might God be calling forth from us now and in the days to come? Let the journey begin now as we pray that we can all respond to God's call with the faith of Abram.