

Sermon – February 28, 2021

Loving God,

May our reflections this day, inspire us to be strong followers of Jesus in both word and deed. Amen.

In our first reading from Genesis today, we hear part of the story of Abraham. God speaks and says:

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.

Gen 17:5-7

Later on in Genesis, because of his unwavering trust in God the creator of heaven and earth, God assures Abraham that:

Through you, all the nations of the world shall be blessed...

Gen 22:18

The Bible is truly an amazing and holy document. It is first and foremost the **story of the relationship** between

God and **humanity** as experienced by groups of people over many centuries. Those of us who decide to enter into that story know the enormous riches of wisdom and comfort to be found here.

The God that we encounter through generations of testimony is a God that has three powerful characteristics:

- 1) God knows the difficulties of being human.**
- 2) God desires to be in relationship with us as much as possible.**
- 3) God constantly reaches out to help us and never gives up on us.**

These powerful characteristics of God animate and shape all the stories that are found in the Bible. They are the three characteristics of God that have been experienced by people down through the ages; through war and peace, through feast and famine, through triumph and failure.

God constantly reaches out to help us and never gives up on us.

Through the stories of the Bible – this is what is referred to as **Our Salvation History**: God reaching out to us in every age. Clearing a path, so that there is the possibility of living in a conscious relationship with our Creator.

In the book of Genesis, the stories of Adam and Eve, the tower of Babel and Noah's Ark are all stories about humanity's weaknesses. The Apple and the Tree of

Knowledge is the story about what makes us a bit different from the other animals. Our ability to imagine things that are not immediately present, and our ability to use language to talk about things that are not immediately present, is incredibly powerful.

Unfortunately, it's a double edge sword. The power to do this can be used to speak truth and care for one another... **but** it can also be used to speak falsehoods and hurt one another. The burden of being human is that we need to help one another choose that which is true and caring rather than that which is false and hurtful. If we do not choose wisely, then we become more and more separated from our Creator and from one another.

3) Abraham and Sarah

2200 BC

But the call of Abraham in the book of Genesis is a great and powerful turning point in the story of Salvation history. God's creation had been marred by humanity's particular weaknesses and sinfulness. Out of this fallible human material however, God eventually chose Abraham to be a blessing on humanity.

The story has God promising that Abraham and his people would have a great historical destiny and would be instrumental in bringing divine blessing upon the families of humankind.

(the added “ha” changes the name from “exalted father” to “father of a multitude”)

It is important for all of us to know that Abraham is the spiritual foundation for Jews, Christians and Muslims. All three religions acknowledge him as the origin of monotheism. All three religions acknowledge him as an important turning point where God was revealed as never before... a point where people were called to be in a more personal relationship with their Creator.

4) The story of Moses

1320 BC

In the Bible we are told of how on account of extended drought, the people of Israel moved into Egypt. God through Joseph saved the Hebrew people and they lived well in a new land. But in the book of Exodus we are told of how a new king in Egypt arose who did not know Joseph and did not favour the Hebrew people. They were put to slave labour and oppressed.

Before long they cried out to God for someone to deliver them – someone to lead them out of Egypt and back into the land that had been promised to them. In time Moses was called upon by God to do just that. He led them out of Egypt, Gave them the Ten Commandments and eventually led them back to the Promised Land.

5) David and Solomon

1037-938 BC

After many years, the shepherd boy David became King of Israel. He united all the Hebrew tribes and made Jerusalem – Mt. Zion - the centre of the nation. After David, his son Solomon ruled Israel. A temple was built and the Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments was kept there. Solomon was a wise and wealthy king.

But unfortunately in his old age the wealth of the kingdom became a problem more than a blessing. People began to pay more attention to their material goods than to their relationship with God. The Kingdom weakened and eventually broke in two parts, Judah and Israel.

7) The Prophets

697-433 BC

The Prophets in Israel were people who interpreted the actions of God in the events of History. They tried to keep alive the memory of the exodus from Egypt and the memory of the great kingdom of David and Solomon. The prophets were always trying re-interpret the meaning of the ancient faith for new times, to proclaim God's will in the present crisis.

After the fall of Israel and Judah, they speak words of hope and comfort as heard in the prophet Isaiah. In the prophet Jeremiah we hear a constant call to repentance, to true faith in God and social justice to all those in need. He sees this as the only way to restore their relationship with God.

As I said before: The God that we encounter in the Bible through generations of testimony is a God that has three powerful characteristics:

- 1) God knows the difficulties of being human.**
- 2) God desires to be in relationship with us as much as possible.**
- 3) God constantly reaches out to help us and never gives up on us.**

In the story of salvation history, the moment comes when all three of these characteristics are embodied and revealed as never before, in a person called Jesus, from Nazareth.

For us Christians, looking back now, it's pretty easy for us to see that God had opened up a particular path for our salvation. The next chapter of salvation history was about to be written. Jesus knew that it was time to turn his face toward Jerusalem. It was time to, one way or another, bring this story to its conclusion.

Peter did not like the look of this path. But Jesus was not going to avoid it. Jesus was going to choose to speak the truth and care for the vulnerable sheep right to the very end. He was going to open a path that would give life to others... even if it meant his own death...

Amen.