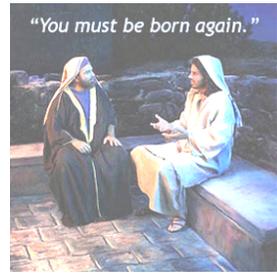


Sunday 12th March 2017

The Second Sunday of Lent

Purple



Collect

Almighty God, you show to those who are in error the light of your truth, that they may return to the way of righteousness: grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Romans 4:1-5 English Standard Version (ESV)

Abraham Justified by Faith

4¹ What then shall we say was gained by^[a] Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵And to the one who does not work but believes in^[b] him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

The Promise Realized Through Faith

¹³For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷as 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.

Footnotes: a. some manuscripts *say about*. b. or *but trusts*; compare verse 24.

COMMENT: As a rabbi well trained in the religious traditions of Israel, Paul cited the call of Abraham as evidence that obedient response to God in faith is the key to Israel's religious heritage. Paul based his conviction that we are given a right relationship with God; 'justified' is the term he used) by similarly responding to God in faith. Obeying the law was not sufficient, he argued. Faith must come first before there can be any obedience to the law. Paul also introduced a unique triangular metaphor of the relationship between faith, works and righteousness thus clarifying for the Romans the distinctive Christian gospel. This he traced back to the ancestral faith of Abraham in contrast to the traditional Jewish understanding of righteousness resulting from obedience to the law. In a diagrammatic image, faith forms the apex of the triangle while works and righteousness form the base. The Jewish concept of righteousness included only the latter two base elements. According to the Jewish view, even Abraham was "justified by works," (verse 1). Paul had a different interpretation of scripture: "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (verse 3) This became for Paul "the righteousness of faith" (verse 13). In other words, for Christians, whatever their background, righteousness and the works that follow from it proceed only from faith. We should also note the changes in the meaning of our English verb, "to believe." Its use in mediaeval and Elizabethan times conveyed the sense of trust in a person, loyalty or commitment to a person. That is the sense in which Paul and all other biblical authors used its Greek equivalent, *pisteuo* when speaking of believing in God or in Jesus Christ. Since the time of Hobbes, Locke and Mills in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, it has gradually taken on the force of a proposition, "to believe that" . We should learn to trust in God - this is exercising 'faith'.

John 3:1-17 English Standard Version (ESV)

You Must Be Born Again

3¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus^[a] by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again^[b] he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.^[c] ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You^[d] must be born again.' ⁸The wind^[e] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you^[f] do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not

believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ^[g] ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ^[h]

For God So Loved the World

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, ^[i] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Footnotes: a. Greek *him*. b. or *from above*; the Greek is purposely ambiguous and can mean both *again* and *from above*; also verse 7. c. the same Greek word means both *wind* and *spirit*. d. the Greek for *you* is plural here. e. the same Greek word means both *wind* and *spirit*. f. the Greek for *you* is plural here; also four times in verse 12. g. some manuscripts add *who is in heaven*. h. some interpreters hold that the quotation ends after verse 15. i. or *For this is how God loved the world*.

COMMENT: John regarded this meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, as one of the most significant events in the theological conflict of Christianity with Judaism. Here he states the real purpose of Jesus’ life and ministry. In many ways, the story reiterates what Paul had said to the Romans: Faith in God’s love so fully revealed in Jesus, God’s Son, is the only means of coming into a right relationship with God and our neighbours in this global age. Indeed, the whole of the New Testament conveys a similar message for all the world.

Psalm 121 *Levai oculos* Grail Psalter

℟ Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

¹ I lift up my eyes to the mountains;
from where shall come my help?

² My help shall come from the Lord
who made heaven and earth. ℟

³ May he never allow you to stumble!
Let him sleep not, your guard.

⁴ No, he sleeps not nor slumbers,
Israel’s guard. ℟

⁵ The Lord is your guard and your shade;
at your right side he stands.

⁶ By day the sun shall not smite you
nor the moon in the night. ℟

⁷ The Lord will guard you from evil,
he will guard your soul.

⁸ The Lord will guard your going and coming
both now and for ever.

✠ Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: The message of the biblical psalm is simple and powerful: God watches over us as permanently as the mountains mark the horizon. Originating also as an antiphonal hymn, the psalm may have been sung by pilgrims approaching the temple mount among the holy hills of Jerusalem after a perilous journey through territory infested with brigands. The ancient road up from Jericho in the Jordan valley was just such a place. Verses 3-4 reflect the terror of a sleepless sentry lest he doze while on watch at night. This psalm excels as poetry in any language. The Hebrew has a repetitive parallelism rising to a climactic affirmation of faith. It opens with a plea for divine help and the response rings throughout, “the Lord is your keeper.” In an ever insecure world, the words in any version touch the deepest spiritual chords in every human heart. Even with those of older years the heart warms to hear this psalm sung or said by those whose trust in God remains strong as their years decline.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks because you give us the spirit of discipline, that we may triumph over evil and grow in grace, as we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed.

Post Communion

Almighty God, you see that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves: keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**