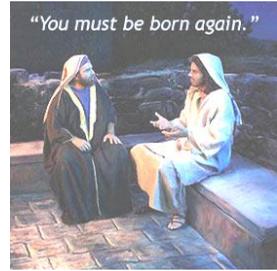


Sunday 8th March 2020

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**

Genesis 12:1-4 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Call of Abram

12 ¹ Now the LORD said^[a] to Abram, "Go from your country^[b] and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."^[c] ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Footnotes: a. or *had said*. b. or *land*. c. or *by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves*.

COMMENT: The call of Abram (or Abraham as he later became known) to leave his homeland and migrate to an unknown country is one of the crucial events of the Old Testament. Apart from the saga itself, there are sixty-five other references to him in the Hebrew scriptures, often in a formulaic association with his son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob. Genesis 11:31 states that Abram's father, Terah, had earlier migrated from Ur of the Chaldeans, near the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to Haran in the upper Euphrates valley. It was from Haran that Abram and his nephew Lot migrated to Canaan (12:4b). According to archeological and linguistic research, this migration corresponds with the movement of Amorite tribes from the northern Arabian desert in both directions southeast along the Tigris-Euphrates valley and southwest into Canaan. This also was the ancient trade route between east and west along the Fertile Crescent. One hypothesis holds that Abram may have been a caravan merchant,

although biblical evidence presents him only as a pastoral chieftain. He was thought to have been a contemporary of Hammurapi, an identifiable historical monarch (ca.1750 BC) in the territory later known as Babylonia, and today as Iraq. The biblical saga of Abram (11:27-25:11) lists as many as twenty-two contacts with a wide variety of tribal groups and individuals. His change of name is explained in relation to the dialectal ‘ab-hammon’ “father of many.” This probably has more to do with his role as the personification of the diverse Semitic clans subsequently united as a confederate people known as Israelites. Whether the stories surrounding this migration are tribal legends or actual events, there is no doubt that they became a formative part of Israel’s faith history. Subsequent generations would look back to this first of Israel’s patriarchs and see in Abram’s obedience to the divine summons the initial response to God’s covenant with Israel. New Testament authors name Abram as a hero second to only Moses. There are as many references to him in the NT as in the OT. Even today the religious significance of this biblical figure for all Middle Eastern cultures cannot be ignored. Jews, Christians and Moslems all regard him as their spiritual progenitor. In this regard, while paying tribute to the late King Hussein of Jordan, the former prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, spoke of “all the children of Abraham.”

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 ^[j] 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*. j. the Greek word rendered ‘only’ is *monogenēs* which means ‘only begotten’. The believers are adopted children of God, it is Jesus only who is by issue from his Father.

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.**