

Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

REFLECTIONS ON THEME

The Lectionary this week challenges what we understand by the word “faith”. What becomes clear here is that faith is not about some intellectual assent to certain propositions. Rather, faith is about the losing of our lives for the sake of the Gospel, which includes both the purpose to which we devote our lives, and the practices by which we seek to live out that purpose. In Abraham’s case, God renews the promise which called Abraham from his homeland. In response Abraham had tried to use very human methods to fulfil God’s promise, with undesirable results. Now God emphasises that not just the purpose, but the ways that purpose is fulfilled, must be directed by God’s agenda. In the Psalm, God’s rulership of the earth is celebrated, along with the justice and grace that this brings to the earth. In the midst of this song of celebration, the psalmist recommits to fulfilling vows to God. In the letter to the Romans, Paul reflects on Abraham’s faith and how it was this, and not obedience to law, that was his righteousness. Here faith is once again viewed as the giving of life to follow God’s purposes, as opposed to simply agreeing to some legalistic propositions. Finally, the Gospel drives the theme home in a very challenging way. Peter, who had just expressed faith in Jesus, is reprimanded because his faith has not yet embraced the implications of what he believes. So, Jesus challenges him, and the other disciples, to allow their faith to become the driving cause for their lives – to lose their lives for the sake of Jesus and the message of God’s Reign that Jesus embodied. Here faith moves from an intellectual activity to a radical, transforming, all-consuming way of being. The challenge of this, and of the Lenten journey, of course, is whether we are ready and willing to embrace this faith, or simply remain with a safer, intellectual pseudo-faith.

(John van der Laar, Sacredise)

COCU 20B. Lent 2B Readings

Psalm 22: 23-31

God is praised and celebrated because God cares and provides for the oppressed, and all nations will come to worship God, both poor and prosperous, healthy and those close to death.

You who fear God, praise God! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify God; stand in awe of God, all you offspring of Israel!

For God did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; God did not hide from me, but heard when I cried to God.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear God. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek God shall praise God. May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to God; and all the families of the nations shall worship before God.

For dominion belongs to God, and God rules over the nations.

To God, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before God shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for God.

Posterity will serve God. Future generations will be told about God, and proclaim God’s deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying ‘God has done it’.

For personal reflection: Psalms for Praying (Nan C. Merrill)

I will tell of your Name to all I meet, in the midst of assemblies I will praise You; You, who are in wonder of the Mystery, give praise! For our loving Creator does not turn away from the afflicted, and does not hide from them; but their cries are heard, their prayers rise up to heaven. To You, O Beloved, I lift up my voice in the great congregation; for You promise to remain with those whose love is steadfast. The hungry shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek You shall sing praises! Your heart is our dwelling place forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Love’s way; and all the families of the nations shall bow down with grateful hearts. For power and authority belong to the Most High, who rules over the nations. Yes the proud of the earth shall be humbled, while

those who still live in fear and illusions will separate themselves not knowing the indwelling Peace of the Beloved. Posterity shall know and serve Love, telling of the One who abides in all to the coming generations, and proclaiming deliverance to a people yet unborn that the Most High dwells among us.

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

God promises Abram and Sarai that they will be parents of many nations, that they will be blessed with many descendants and that kings will come from them. God changes Abram's name to Abraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah – Princess. When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 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. God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Romans 4:13-25

Abraham did not receive God's promise through obeying the law, but through faith, and this faith was considered to be his righteousness - his approval by God. In the same way, when we place our faith in Christ, who died and was raised, it is considered our righteousness - our approval by God. For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no

law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as 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. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Mark 8: 31-38

Jesus predicts his death, but Peter objects. Jesus reprimands Peter, and tells all his followers that they must take up their crosses and follow him, not trying to save their lives, but willingly giving them up for the sake of the Gospel.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? (cont...)