

Philippians 3:17-4:1: *Paul's encouragement for believers to stay true for the sake of Christ, and to remember their heavenly priorities, following his example of faithfulness.*

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Luke 13:31-35: *Jesus is warned that Herod wants to kill him, and dismisses this as his face is set toward Jerusalem. Then he laments over the city which fails to heed the prophets.*

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

COCU20C Lent 2C Readings

To what extent does faith offers us blessing and protection, and to what extent is it a call to suffer for the higher cause of God's justice, peace and liberation?

This week's readings paint a picture of contrasts. On the one hand, there is the assurance of God's mercy and protection. Abraham receives promises from God of covenant relationships and descendants as numerous as the stars, and the psalmist affirms God's mercy and protection and the joy of living in God's presence and love. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul also indicates that those who follow faithfully are not headed for destruction, like godless people, but for glory.

On the other hand the Gospel reading this week shows the persecution Jesus faced as he faithfully followed God's call. A striking feature of this reading is Jesus' refusal to be daunted by the threats against his life, and his determination to continue his mission in spite of the suffering he will face, like the prophets before him.

So, the Lectionary, while it assures us that close, protective relationship with God is available to us, also reminds us that the call to live out God's mission does not mean a life free of pain and struggle. The protection we find in God, then, is not a guarantee that no harm will come to us, but a promise that, whatever we may face, we are ultimately destined for glory, and God's strength will sustain us and keep us faithful to the end. In a world of expediency the call to embrace the tough and challenging path of the Gospel can seem out of place, but, if we will trust it and embrace it, we will discover the life that endures through the worst times and that empowers us in the best times.

Can both of these aspects of faith be true at the same time? These are the challenges posed by this week's Lectionary, and the answer, reflected in Jesus, is a resounding "yes"! We can know the pain of persecution and suffering even as we rest in God's protective presence. May our worship give us the strength and wisdom to embrace and live these two seemingly contradictory truths.

(John van de Laar, Sacredise)

Psalm 27

A song of assurance for God's protection and care, expressing the longing to live in God's sanctuary and find refuge there. In addition, the psalmist asks for God's mercy and rescue from his enemies.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh - my adversaries and foes - they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

**One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in God's temple.**

For God will shelter me in the day of trouble; God will conceal me under the cover of the tent; God will set me high on a rock. Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

**I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.**

**Wait for the Lord; be strong,
and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!**

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Abram's faith leads him into relationship with God (righteousness) & God makes a covenant with Abram, promising him that he will have a son to be his heir, and descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky.

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the Lord came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,