

Lent II 2021, February 28, 2021

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16, Romans 4:13-25, Mark 8:31-38, Psalm 22:22-30

Some Sunday readings are very clear in their message; and some Sunday lessons leave us wondering “What on earth was that about?” This morning’s lectionary is the second category leaving us to ask “What exactly is going on here?”

In the Genesis reading we’ll hear how Abraham and Sarah spent their long married life praying for God to give them the gift and blessing of children. I suspect after 20 or 30 years, they probably gave up hope. I probably would. I seriously doubt, in their 90’s they ever expected God would answer that prayer. Yet at 94 Abraham’s prayer and hope is not only answered, but Abraham at the literal 11th hour becomes the father of every Jew, Muslim, and Christian of all time. “Man proposes and God abundantly disposes.”

Our second mystery this morning will be something of a fight between two best friends, Jesus and St. Peter. Jesus is going to publicly announce that he’s going to be executed and resurrected. Peter will rebuke Jesus. Jesus will rebuke Peter and it’s all going to get a bit tense. “Rebuke” is such an old fashioned word. We hardly ever use it anymore. Nowadays, we “scold” or we “lecture or we snap at”, but none of those words quite capture “rebuking”. Rebuke has more of a “Putting someone in their place connotation.

Peter almost always get everything wrong, that’s one of the things I like about him. I totally empathize that Peter just does not want to hear his best friend talk about getting murdered. I’d probably rebuke him too, just like I do when ever my mother starts talking about her funeral arrangements. I always rebuke her trying to put her back in her place of living on this side of the grave.

Jesus is going to say “The son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the priests and scribes, and be killed, and after 3 days rise again.” I’d guess Peter didn’t even notice the “rise again” part. He wants Jesus to be a triumphant Messiah, a great King in the majesty his friend deserves, not a scandalous place of suffering, rejection and execution. So he rebukes Jesus and he tries to put Jesus back in his place of triumph.

But Jesus isn’t having any of that. Peter doesn’t get to call the shots. Peter isn’t God the Messiah. Peter wanted to lead God to his proper place. So, Jesus must put Peter back in his proper place. Peter should be behind Jesus, not trying to lead the Leader. Peter rebukes Jesus and Jesus rebukes Peter.

The story gets weirder when Jesus calls Peter “Satan”. “Get behind me, Satan!” “You’re thinking in human terms, not divine terms”. So human thinking is Satanic? Satan, in the Bible, is “the Accuser” and God is the Chooser. God chooses Abraham and Sarah. God chooses Mary. God chooses Paul, and Apostles, and prophets, and king and queens. God is always choosing. His choosing is always for the benefit of all people though. Everyone ends up special that way. A divine way of thinking.

Satan, on the other hand, is a trickster. Satan is the Accuser, singling people out a prosecuting attorney singling people out and convicting them. Choosing them not for the benefit of all but for the violent division of us all.

Jesus steps in and takes our place as the Accused. On the cross Jesus is the one accused and refuses to be the Accuser. Instead of accusing his murders, he forgives them, a very un-human way of doing things.

By raising Jesus from the dead, the God of Life exposes Satan's tricks and our human system of scapegoating.

So, why 2,000 years later do we still feel like we are living in a world controlled by Satan? Why are our minds still set on human rather than divine things? Why is our American system of Justice still set on thinking we are chosen to accuse and condemn others?

St. Paul, a lawyer himself had accused and punished "bad people" who broke the law. Then, one day, Jesus put him in his place and knocked him off his high horse, and asked him "Why are you persecuting me, I'm God!"

Paul eventually realized Jesus took the place of the Accused, not the Accuser, and Paul had to totally re-evaluated his understanding of the law, that God's Law of Love is our only way. Setting our minds on divine things, not satanic human ways. The Divine law of unconditional love for the benefit of all, even going so far as to love our enemies.

It's taken us 2,000 years so far to try and live up to the divine way, choosing ordinary people like you and me who aren't "more special" than our neighbors. We put ourselves in our place sharing the Love of the Cross, not as some private asceticism or competition of who suffers more wins. That's a satanic worldly way of thinking.

No, we are called to a divine way of thinking, oin our proper place behind St. Peter, behind Paul, and all the others called to be behind Jesus.

We are called in Baptism to our place chosen by God the Chooser, forgiven and unconditionally loved and chose to share the Good news from a cross to help others not get tricked by Satan's way of an eye for an eye of hitting harder those who hit us.

"If anyone wants to follow the divine way of Unconditional love, be prepared to die rather than kill. If we want to save our lives, we will lose them. If we lose our lives in this divine law of unconditional love, we will be safe.

"For what will it profit us to gain the Way of the World and lose our souls, our lives?

Let us now listen attentively with the ears of our hearts and set our minds on the divine things we're about to hear."

