

Chivalry vs Chauvinism- God's Reassurance & Desire to Thoughtfully Care

2 Sunday in Lent C

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Introduction

Though we sometimes doubt & often resist God's desire to protect & save us, our God persists. In holy baptism, God's people have been called & gathered into a God-initiated relationship that will endure. Lent provides the church with a time & a tradition in which to seek God's face again. Lent provides another occasion to behold the God of our salvation in the face of the Blessed One who "comes in the name of the Lord."

First Reading: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

God promises a childless & doubting Abram that he will have a child, that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars, & that the land of Canaan will be their inheritance. Abram's trust in God is sealed with a covenant-making ceremony, a sign of God's promise.

¹After 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." ²But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, & the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³& Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, & so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." ⁴But 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." ⁵The Lord brought Abram outside & said, "Look toward heaven & count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then the Lord said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶& Abram believed the Lord; & the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness. ⁷Then the Lord said to Abram, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." ⁸But Abram said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹The Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, & a young pigeon." ¹⁰Abram brought him all these & cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹& when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. ¹²As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, & a deep & terrifying darkness descended upon him. ¹⁷When the sun had gone down & it was dark, a smoking fire pot & a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸On 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."

Gospel: Luke 13:31-35

Neither Herod's plotting nor Jerusalem's resistance to maternal love will deter Jesus from his sacrificial mission.

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came & said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." ³²Jesus said to them, "Go & tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons & performing cures today & tomorrow, & on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, & the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets & 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, & you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. & 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.'"

Overview - Purpose & Perseverance

This week's gospel text from Luke presents another temptation for Jesus. The Pharisees approach Jesus with a warning about his safety, telling him to "get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you" (Luke 13:31). Not only do the Pharisees want Jesus to leave, but one can assume they also want Jesus to stop doing what he was doing: speaking against the Pharisees, teaching about God, & healing on the sabbath. We know the Pharisees are "very hostile" (Luke 11:53) toward Jesus, so we can conclude that their warning is not a genuine expression of concern but rather an attempt to stop his mission & ministry. However, Jesus will not be distracted or turned away from his purpose, even if that includes moving toward his own death in Jerusalem. In Jesus' ability to fulfill his purpose, even in the midst of opposition, we find inspiration as we seek to live our lives in concert with God's purposes. As Christians, Jesus' purpose is our purpose. The church, the body of Christ, doesn't exist for itself. Rather, the church exists to be a partner with God in God's mission to love, bless, & reconcile the world.

Theological Reflection

In Genesis 15:17, the presence of God is symbolized by a smoking firepot & a flaming torch. In the Bible, the Spirit of God is often connected with the image of fire (Exodus 3:2; Acts 2:3; Hebrews 12:29), which represents God's power. In the physical world, fire can be both restorative & destructive. When fire is voluntary & contained, such as when we gather around a campfire or cook on a wood-fired stove, it can evoke a feeling of comfort & camaraderie. When it is unplanned & uncontrolled, such as a house fire, forest fire, or arson, it can feel scary & violent. Yet, in the example of a

forest fire, the fire clears the way for new growth. A sermon might reflect on these contrasting images of fire, focusing on the truth that the spiritual growth that comes from the refining fire & power of God's Spirit may not always be sought out, but the result is new life & rejuvenation.

Theological Reflection

In Luke 13:34 Jesus laments, expressing his desire to gather Jerusalem like "a hen gathers her brood under her wings." Especially outdoors, baby chicks require constant care & protection to survive. This image of Jesus as a mother hen reflects God's desire to protect & care for all God's children amid the many dangers & temptations that exist. A sermon could reflect on the many ways the people of God share in this caregiving work, as family caregivers, nurses, hospice workers, food shelf volunteers, daycare providers, & more. Invite worshipers to pray for these caregivers throughout the week.

Current Event

To further reflect on the theme of shelter, & the many ways we can provide shelter to others, consider the story of someone such as [Jacqui Jorgeson](#), in Sonoma County, California. In response to the fires that have afflicted her area in recent years, Jaqui started a nonprofit to support the volunteer firefighters who work hard to protect the community. One of the organization's projects is called Stock-a-Truck, which provides volunteer firefighters with supplies such as a portable cook station, coffee maker, & dehydrated meals & coffee to go with them.

Denominational Resource

Almost daily we read or hear about people around the world fleeing their home country because of violence or turmoil. Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service is one example of an organization working to advocate for migrants & refugees & assisting people caught in conflict or facing persecution. Since its founding, LIRS has worked with partner organizations to resettle more than 500,000 immigrants & refugees. Perhaps there is someone in your congregation or community who is passionate about this issue.

Theological Reflection

In holy baptism God's people have been called & gathered into a God-initiated relationship that will endure. Living in & out of this relationship strengthens us to participate in God's work in the world. The assembly welcomes the newly baptized with these words: "We welcome you into the body of Christ & into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks & praise to God & bearing God's creative & redeeming word to all the world" (*ELW*, p. 231). What are some ways that the people in your congregation

are participating in this work? What difference does the calling they have received in baptism make in their daily lives?

Connections with Creation

“Look toward heaven & count the stars, if you are able to count them” (Gen. 15:5). God’s invitation would likely prove less impressive if Abram lived now. You may recall especially vivid experiences of a night sky when you were someplace dark with a really clear, perfect view. But in most places on the planet today, light pollution, air pollution, & even water vapor impede our vision & block the stars. We humans have obstructed our understanding of God’s expansive promise. Besides going out to stargaze, you might learn about the International Dark-Sky Association’s work to regain our view of the stars: darksky.org.

Second Sunday in Lent

Lent is the time for the renewal of our baptismal covenant. Each reading gives us a picture of our need—no children, no homeland, enemies around, a hungry fox—and each presents us with an image of salvation—descendants, a home, citizenship, protective wings. This is one of the few Sundays in which Christ is compared to a mother.

[Luke 13:31-35](#)

We are like helpless chicks; a fox is lurking; & Christ is our mother hen. Lent is a time to cast out demons & to await the third day when Christ finishes his work of salvation. We give to Jesus Christ the divine “name of the Lord.” This passage is an example of how the gospel narratives are but preludes to the passion accounts. Writing in a somewhat benign tone about those outside the faith, Luke in the late 80s here gives the Pharisees a welcome role, warning Jesus of coming death. Pharisees were a lay movement who advocated strict separation from others & a rigorous adherence to both the written & the oral Torah. A fox eats chickens: only Luke’s passion account includes an episode with Herod (23:6-12). Luke has Jesus citing Psalm 118:26, a pilgrimage psalm with messianic overtones, which is later repeated by the crowds in the palm procession (19:38). Also there (19:39), Pharisees warn Jesus about possible danger. Yet the “third day” is approaching.

[Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18](#)

The Spirit of God, manifest as fire, visits us with the promise of life: a life imaged both as multiple descendants & as a homeland. Like Abram, we believe in this promise, & such faith counts as righteousness. In the cross, Christ takes on the lot of the slain animals. This excerpt narrates two promises God made to Abraham: the multitude of his descendants & ownership of the l&. Of the first (1-6): in ancient Israelite culture, life

after death was ensured through the life of one's descendants. Of the second (7-18): in such animal sacrifices, the two contracting parties passed between the two halves of the carcasses, symbolizing their willingness to suffer the fate of the animals if they broke the covenant. Here God, manifest in the fire of the flaming torch, is one of the two parties. The Old Testament focus on God's covenant is found in stories involving Noah, Abraham, Moses, & David. God has called on Abram to leave Ur (now in Iraq) & to "Go ... to the I& I will show you" ([12:1](#)). God has blessed him, & he, his wife Sarah & his brother Lot have migrated to Canaan. Famine has struck the I&, causing Abram & his family to seek food in Egypt. Pharaoh has been attracted to Sarah, thinking that she is Abram's sister, taking her into the royal household. When he has discovered that she is Abram's wife, he has ordered them to leave the country. Our reading is two stories of gifts from God: in vv. [1-6](#), a son & many descendants; in vv. [7ff](#), the L&. The formula "the word of the Lord came to ..." (vv. [1](#), [4](#)) is later used of prophets; Abram is called a prophet in [20:7](#). God makes Abram his favorite; he will protect ("shield", v. [1](#)) him. Abram's "reward" is really a free gift. Custom was that if a man's wife did not bear him a son, his chief servant ("slave", v. [3](#)), here "Eliezer" (v. [2](#)), might inherit. God promises Abram a son ("your very own issue", v. [4](#)) & he will have countless descendants ("stars", v. [5](#)). Abram puts his trust in God's promise; in this way, he establishes a right relationship ("righteousness", v. [6](#)) with God. God's words in v. [7](#) are like those he speaks later at Mount Sinai. But this time, Abram is not so trusting: he asks for a sign or sworn oath (v. [8](#)). From Jeremiah we know that the ceremony in vv. [9-10](#) & [17](#) is of ancient origin. Going between the two halves ("pieces", v. [17](#)) of sacrificial victims signified that if a party broke the agreement, he could expect to be dismembered. As in v. [1](#), Abram has a vision (v. [12](#)): the descent of the sun, "deep sleep", terror & great "darkness" express the awesomeness of supernatural intervention. God's presence is symbolized by fire (v. [17](#)). Only he has obligations under the pact, so only he passes between the "pieces". The *deal* is *cut* (thus the Hebrew), as are the victims: David's empire later stretched almost from the Nile to near the upper reaches of the "Euphrates" (v. [18](#)). (In the other version of this story, God changes Abram's name to Abraham to signify his new relationship to God.)

Images in the Readings

There are lots of animals in this Sunday's readings. Like other evils that lurk around, a **fox** is a clever predator that lives off the death of the unsuspecting meek. The young of **chickens** are notoriously weak, & the mother **hen** protects them under her wings. Many Old Testament poetic passages speak of God as having outstretched wings. Now in the Louvre in Paris is the 1562 painting by Frans Floris, "Allegory of the Trinity,"

in which God the Father & the dove of the Spirit attend Christ, whose arms extended on the cross are superimposed upon immense wings, under which all the faithful are gathered. You can find a photo of this most interesting painting on the internet. Israel, like its pagan neighbors, conducted **animal sacrifices** in which the life of the valuable animal symbolized the devotion of the worshiper. This practice of animal sacrifice is recalled when Christians compare Christ to a lamb. God is present to Abram as a flaming torch. From the burning bush of Moses to the tongues “as of fire” on the forehead of each believer, **fire** functions in the Bible as a symbol of the power of God. Fire not only burns refuse away, but it also occasions human community: gathering around the fire, we share heat & light, & we cook food to eat together.

Comments from the Cloud of Witnesses

We are brought again by the motherhood of mercy & grace into our natural place, for which we were created by the motherhood of natural love. A mother’s service is nearest, readiest, & surest. It is nearest because it is most natural. It is readiest because it is most loving. & it is surest because it is most true. We realize that all our mothers bear us for pain & for dying. But our true mother Jesus—all love—alone bears us for joy & for endless living, blessed may he be! He sustains us within himself in love & hard labor, until the fullness of time. Yet it is necessary for him to feed us, for the most precious love of motherhood had made him a debtor to us. A mother can give her child her milk to suck, but our precious mother Jesus can feed us with himself. He does so most courteously & most tenderly, with the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life.

—*Julian of Norwich* [Julian of Norwich, in *Revelations of Divine Love*, ed. M. L. de Mastro (Garden City, NY: Image, 1977), 191-93.]

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