

Bible Study
Second Sunday in Lent, Year A
March 12, 2017

[RCL] Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

“For God so loved the world...”

The etymology of “Lent” comes from the old German word for “long,” and it is believed to refer to the lengthening days of the spring season. So, Lent can properly be interpreted as a time of lengthening, or stretching. It is a time to stretch our faith, and in this week’s readings, we see multiple examples of ways in which God is calling us to stretch ourselves and our faith. But in asking us to stretching ourselves, God also demonstrates God’s massive outpouring of love for all of us. God is ready to help us along our Lenten journey. God’s love is waiting for us to stretch ourselves enough that we can truly see how big God’s love can be.

Genesis 12:1-4a

The Lord is pushing Abram. “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house.” He is challenging Abram to leave everything that he knows behind, and to form a new nation. It is a tremendous promise from God, but it is also meant to stretch Abram. Now, Abram really has to show God if he really believes God. Abram is about to put his faith into action.

- How might God be calling us to stretch ourselves during this Lenten season?
- How might we put our faith into action?

Psalm 121

After reading Genesis, Abram most likely had a lot of questions for God. The Psalm seems to be answering Abram’s questions. Abram probably worried about where he was going and how he would survive in this new land. The answer to all Abram’s questions is the Lord. The Lord will watch over Abram as Abram embarks on God’s new plan for Abram. The Psalm is showing the breadth and depth of God’s love for us. “The Lord shall watch over your going out and coming in.” God’s love for us is bigger than we can humanly imagine.

- What questions do you have for God?
- Where is God calling you to trust in God’s love?

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

Even as we stretch ourselves, this week’s reading from Romans points out that we are not saved by our own works, but purely by God’s righteousness. Therefore, as we think about the sacrifices that we are making for Lent, we need to understand our rationale for those sacrifices. Are we doing them to win God’s favor? That would be unnecessary. We have already won God’s love. God loves us because God has made us lovable. Rather, we might consider our Lenten practices as ways to draw us closer to God, to lengthen our faith and to more fully appreciate God’s love for us.

- Are you giving something up for Lent? Why?
- Is your Lenten practice likely to lengthen your faith and draw you closer to God?

John 3:1-17

Nicodemus is understandably confused. He was a Jewish leader, and yet Jesus is offering a theology that is entirely new to him. Jesus is stretching Nicodemus, and Nicodemus is willing to be stretched. He is trying to keep up with Jesus. But, then, Jesus offers the most hopeful message of his ministry. “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Jesus is offering God’s salvation. As in the Romans reading for this week, Jesus is providing another explanation of the breadth and depth of God’s love for humanity. God created this world and all the living things in this world. Therefore, God has no interest in condemning it, but in loving it. There is nothing that any of us have done to warrant such an unconditional love, but God provides it, nonetheless. It requires us to stretch our minds and hearts to contemplate a love as broad as the love of God. In this Lenten season, we are stretched to start to appreciate God’s love for us.

- What does God’s “unconditional love” mean to you?
- Like Nicodemus, how do you with integrate God’s unconditional love into your life?
- How might we focus on the breadth of God’s love as part of our Lenten practices?

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