



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Lent 2 (C)
March 17, 2019

[RCL] Genesis 15:1-12,17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18

At issue for so many of us is the question of our legacy – what will become of us. It is a question that often presumes life beyond our breathing, beyond our merely being alive, beyond ourselves as individual human beings. For while we may not have the capacity to envision the future, it not for want of trying. Yet, still up for question is why even bother considering a legacy – why even bother attempting to imagine ourselves beyond ourselves: that our prized possessions may be well maintained? That our hard work might not have been in vain? Is it the immediate joy in simply thinking about a world in which we exist beyond our bodies – the thrill of a transcendence that our bodies seem to restrict? Whatever the reason for our human propensity to think about legacy, thinking of our lives beyond our lives will always require other persons who can tell the story and a world in which the story can be told...

For Abram – like many of us – the concern of legacy, of being remembered, is directly connected to the capacity to produce (especially offspring). And though there is already a child in Abram's house, he does not think that child worthy. So, the Lord promises Abram what he most desires – the fruit of his own labor. But, the Lord's promise is not the *real* reward here. The *real* reward is coming face to face with the reality that the Lord is the creative center of our imagination and hopes for the future. Let's look closely, for example, at all that God demands of Abram to convince him that he is heard: counting the infinite stars; bringing the heifer, the goat, the ram, the turtledove, and the pigeon. The Lord requires Abram to defer, in imagining his legacy, to the fruitfulness of the earth which the Lord created. As such, Abram's legacy is not truly *his*, but the Lord's. In turn, the same can be said for us: all that we have comes from the Lord; all that we produce is from mere participation in what the Lord has *already* provided, not our own ingenuity. And, in this way, if legacy is to be a positive human concern, it mustn't be rooted in one's *own* capacity to produce or reproduce, but in one's desire to have been an active and humble participant in the richness of God's *alreadied* creation.

- How do you understand your own legacy as tied to your relationship with God?
- How has God provided you provision midst anxiety about the future?

Psalm 27

There are times for every human person when *all* of life appears as though a great war. Around every corner, it seems there awaits a battle more fearsome than the last. Troubled relationships; unfulfilled aspirations; unemployment; sickness; hunger; death. There are, for every person, if we are honest, these moments of travail. And characteristic of such troubles are often feelings of loneliness, weakness, and defeat – when one becomes acutely aware that no measure of self-possession or mental fortitude can stand, singularly, against the rabble and restlessness of life. Feelings, an awareness, that may become *very* convincing internal narratives. Internal narratives that may become the only lens through which one learns to see the world as always already lost.

It is not unusual, in such times, for people of faith to turn to the psalms for guidance, as a means of reframing sight. The 27th Psalm is a paradigm in this respect. Here, the psalmist invites us into a vulnerable, two-fold moment of self-identification—the first of which is identifying with a basic feeling of “me against the world!” (there are enemies, adversaries in which our closest loved ones may be numbered) – deeply unsettling, to say the least. The second of which is identifying with the fact that we are, indeed, never truly alone (the Lord remains an ever-present help) – a fact *for* which we give thanksgiving and *to* which we call out. In so giving thanks and calling out, the light of The Lord – slowly but surely – becomes the energy through which our internal narratives are transformed, through which the battles of life are not always already lost, but always already *won*.

- What are some troubles in your own life, presently?
- In the past, what have you learned from waiting patiently for the Lord?

Philippians 3:17-4:1

A common theme in Christian literature is to frame “earth” and “heaven” as diametrically opposed concepts, in order to make a point about the problems that things like human arrogance, power, and greed pose for one’s salvation. Earlier on in the third chapter of the epistle, the Apostle distinguishes between “the flesh” and “the spirit” – a dichotomy that matches that of “earth” and “heaven”. Both “flesh” and “spirit,” and “earth” and “heaven” point to the difference between a life of human corruption and a life of Christ-like love. This does not mean, though, that the flesh (or earth) is bad, and the spirit (or heaven) is good. Rather, flesh and the earth come into their fullest potential when their desires are transformed by, and conformed to the witness and life and glory exemplified and given by God made flesh - Jesus.

Citizenship in heaven, then, does not give us permission to be sloppy about citizenship on earth. Our citizenship in heaven was granted through the cross of Christ, from which was poured out the Holy Spirit on *all* flesh. Therefore, we are citizens of heaven insofar as the Spirit of God in Christ dwells in us and makes us one family. Such a vision *must* leave us to question the ways that even Christians have been “enemies of the cross of Christ,” the ways in which Christians have peered (and continue to) through the earthen eyes of human phobia, and not the heavenly eyes of Christic love. When earth and heaven are read not as separated, but intertwined, our salvation – and how we live in light of it – becomes a matter of thanksgiving through ethical responsibility.

- What does it feel like to become aware of oneself looking through earthen eyes?
- How might our heavenly citizenship come to bear on contemporary questions of political citizenship?

Luke 13:31-35

Sometimes it is too late. Sometimes we miss an opportunity to speak to a person, see a thing, make a change. The warning signs may have all been there. The door may have been opened. The time may have been ripe. But for some reason, we refused, we stalled, we ignored. And then, the day comes when we try to plead a case that appears all but lost. This, on some level, seems to describe how Jesus understands the trajectory of his reception by some. Yet, there is forgiveness in Christ that redeems, it would seem, even unconscionable refusals to be drawn in, to be awakened, to be saved.

That's the interesting thing about this passage, really: Jesus doesn't exactly stipulate what will happen to those who will only come to receive him when it appears to be too late. Though he knows that they will say at the last minute, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord," Jesus doesn't then reply, "and I'll say WHATEVER!" No! In fact, long before this lament that his work has gone unappreciated for its gravity – to the point of assassination – he assures the Pharisees, regardless of those who cannot or refuse to hear, that he will finish the work he has come to do; until (and beyond) his death, he will cast out demons and perform cures. And in his resistance, in Jesus' refusal to be undermined by threats of violence, is the Good News! It is Good News because we know that the finishing of Jesus' work is not when he draws his last breath on the cross, but when he reveals, by conquering death, that his power to rebuke and heal is the very power that holds *all* the universe together. Forever we are welcomed to be drawn in, awakened, saved.

- In what ways is Christ trying to draw you in, but you have refused?
- What obstacles stand in the way of your being drawn into Christ?

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