

Faith in God's Interests

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Second Lent

2-28-21

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-21 Romans 4:13-25 Mark 8: 31-38

Psalm 22: 23-31

Summary: Despite all appearances, all logic, and every law, what God says will come, not to pass but to stay.

We believe in what is, to almost everyone who does not trust God, a laughably impossible story. Our people, Christians and the Hebrew believers who came before us, have believed in the impossible from the very beginnings of faith,

We can see this with Abram and Sarai, who are renamed Abraham and Sarah by a God whose promise convulses both with laughter. "I'm as good as dead," Abraham chuckles, "and my wife has been barren all her life." He asks God to lead Ishmael, a child of his but not by Sarah, in his ways.

God agrees, thus setting up the Arabian dynasty, but insists that the joke will be on them and worldly assumptions. Despite their laughter, both our forefather and foremother believe that God will do as He said. God did, and we are here today because of that.

God counts the faith of that pair as righteousness. Neither Abraham nor Sarah was righteous in their lives, then or even later as they followed a new path. Nonetheless, laugh or mock as snide observers may, God sees this faith in His impossible Word and applies it to a Cross which no one yet even imagines.

Paul knows that it makes sense to think that we earn our way to Heaven through obedience to God's law. That makes sense to people, but God is not about Karma or any plan that makes our efforts something that might reach up to God. We tried that with the tower of Babel and it all just came crashing down at our feet. God's law just shows us how wrong we are. Only God can call into being that which does not exist, namely: my righteousness. We do not reach up to Him, He reaches down to us, condescends as Don put it last week. Laugh if you must but take God at His Word.

Just before the hike up the mountain I spoke of the week before last – the mount of transfiguration – Peter hits a personal low only exceeded by his denial of Jesus in Pilate's courtyard. Jesus explains that He must die on the Cross, but that death will not stick to Him because of God's promise. Peter objects, loudly, to this nonsense. Jesus replies, "Get behind me Satan, for you are not setting your mind on God's interests but man's." Jesus then promises all of us a cross and tells us that winning is losing and that the only way to find our lives is to give them up.

One of my junior sermons is about “Take up your Cross.” [*mime taking it up*] Boy, that is heavy! As I followed Jesus, I came to a party and looked in there. I could just squeeze in by trimming and holding my cross sideways. The food was rich but made me queasy, the drink made me dizzy, and He was not there. Going on, I met some cute guys. I trimmed my cross down to hide conveniently in my blouse pocket, but they were not going His way; so, we parted.

At last, I came to Heaven. There was Jesus waiting for me before the gates but there was a deep, fiery chasm between us. “How do I get over?” I asked Him.

“Use your cross,” He replied. I took what remained out of my blouse – oops!

“I made my Cross too small,” I confessed. “I’m not good enough.”

Jesus just smiled and blew away the smoke rising from the fires at the bottom of the chasm between us. Suddenly, I saw a huge Cross bridging the gap. “You can use mine,” He explained. [*mime crossing*]

My story ends there. I do not know what happens next, but I know what has happened beforehand. Laugh if you must, but I do hunger and thirst after righteousness. I believe I will be filled, and so will you. Amen.