

Lent 2, 2022, St. Andrew's Hopkinton  
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O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **Old Testament**

### **Genesis 15:1-12,17-18**

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." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But 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." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On 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."

## Psalm 27

Dominus illuminatio

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom then shall I fear? \*  
the Lord is the strength of my life;  
of whom then shall I be afraid?

2 When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, \*  
it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who  
stumbled and fell.

3 Though an army should encamp against me, \*  
yet my heart shall not be afraid;

4 And though war should rise up against me, \*  
yet will I put my trust in him.

5 One thing have I asked of the Lord;  
one thing I seek; \*  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life;

6 To behold the fair beauty of the Lord \*  
and to seek him in his temple.

7 For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe  
in his shelter; \*  
he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling  
and set me high upon a rock.

8 Even now he lifts up my head \*  
above my enemies round about me.

9 Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation  
with sounds of great gladness; \*  
I will sing and make music to the Lord.

10 Hearken to my voice, O Lord, when I call; \*  
have mercy on me and answer me.

11 You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face." \*  
Your face, Lord, will I seek.

12 Hide not your face from me, \*  
nor turn away your servant in displeasure.

13 You have been my helper;  
cast me not away; \*  
do not forsake me, O God of my salvation.

14 Though my father and my mother forsake me, \*  
the Lord will sustain me.

15 Show me your way, O Lord; \*  
lead me on a level path, because of my enemies.

16 Deliver me not into the hand of my adversaries, \*  
for false witnesses have risen up against me,  
and also those who speak malice.

17 What if I had not believed  
that I should see the goodness of the Lord \*  
in the land of the living!

18 O tarry and await the Lord's pleasure;  
be strong, and he shall comfort your heart; \*  
wait patiently for the Lord.

### **The Epistle**

#### **Philippians 3:17-4:1**

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

### **The Gospel**

#### **Luke 13:31-35**

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

### **Homily:**

“It has been hard to come back to church.” Someone said to me recently. “after so much of the world has changed.”

“Covid turned my life upside down, and the news about our climate grows worse. ...and just as I could almost pretend, if I needed to, that things were returning to some pre-pandemic normal, Russia invaded Ukraine.”

“So I see now that we will never go back to life before the pandemic.”

...

“And as I’m returning to church, I find I don’t have any energy to do the “nice church” I once rallied myself for. I cannot pretend to have it all together. I need worship, prayers and conversations that acknowledge that we are in great, upside down, need.”

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These words have lingered with me.

So that I heard the same concern in Abram the father of Israel talking with God.

**“Do not be afraid, Abram, said God, I am your shield, and your reward will be very great.”** (“Welcome into a safe space.”)

Abram replies something to the effect of: That’s a nice promise God, but, my world is upside down. I literally have no children. Does our family have a future? “Who will inherit the earth?”

(And, I have heard this question recently, *God, what will be the value of their inheritance?*)

...

When you hear God saying, “Do not be afraid” it’s okay to mix is up a little with God; tell him your fears, and ask him to speak his promise again, and be more specific.

Abram believed, and also said, “how will I know?”. (I love that he gives us a model of doing these simultaneously!)

Abram was arguing with God in order to understand God’s promise while his world was upside down. Like ours.

God heard that Abram was in great need. And *specifically* promised in response to that need: children, and a land to live in. Particular land, “between this river and this river”.

Abram is an example to the church that it is good to speak our fears and needs.

...

*And*, I believe we ought to expect a tangible response like Abram received.

...

((By the way, this is a great way to use scripture to help you in your life. I don't recommend just opening your Bible randomly and searching for the answer to your present need. I've done that in the past, but it's slow work. Instead, look for someone in the Bible who is *having the same kind of problem as you*, and then learn from what they do, with God's help.))

...

Be alert and prepare yourself: At the close of God's response he says to Abram, “to seal this promise, bring your livelihood out here before me (his animals right?), and sacrifice some of it.” And a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. And the fire of God passed through his sacrifice.

...

The promise called for Abram to give himself, and became an *affirmation* that he could not go back.

From the offering of our selves, the fire of God's covenant makes a New future.

...

...

I thought about this and about **how we make church together**.

**Q: How are we to pray, sing, worship, and act so that God can make something New of us, when the world has changed?**

...

When I heard Jesus in today's Gospel lesson, I loved him for showing what a response might look like in real life.

The Pharisees cry out about the upside down world, "**Jesus, get out of here, Herod wants to kill you!**"

Jesus, clearly aware that the world is upside down, responds:

**"You go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am [busy with work that can't wait,] casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow...and on the third day I finish my work.**

...I'll get back to Herod when it's time."

Washed over by our fears, concerns, and cries for help, Jesus got flippant! It's good to know we don't have to be "serious of face" all the time, even when the world is upside down.

...

And it was useful...because Jesus knew and revealed what to be flippant about, and what to take seriously.

I like Jesus' flippancy to help us along.

Flippancy, when the word was coined, was a virtue; the action of flipping, being nimble. As a good thing, in its original use.

...

So this is the place of the whole church now:

As the message comes in: "covid is coming to kill you", "climate change is coming to kill you", "Putin is coming to kill you"...to say:

...LISTEN! You go and tell *death* that we are busy; performing healings, casting out demons, yes.

...

Abram taught us to let it out with God; speak our fears about the world being upside down.

Feel free to share that with your neighbor here. Or feel free to spend some time on your knees or sitting with your eyes closed and let God know about it.

At our best, we can be that open. And listen to God's response.

And Jesus taught that there are some things we do as the church that don't stop even when the world sets its hair on fire.

We're gonna sing, we're gonna pray for healing. We're gonna sacrifice of ourselves and let God turn that sacrifice into Eucharist, food for the hungry, a home for the unhoused.

At our best, we can be like Jesus, responding to the world's fears, but in God's time, and with God's order of operations. Hurting people first, kings with tantrums last.

...

This is subjective work, and we have to do it together.

"Returning to church" after the pandemic, the way we're doing church here today, may be to one person reassurance and to another frustration. It may be to the same person reassurance one day and frustration the next.

I need your help to know what to be flip about and what to focus on.

But let's be people willing to say, at some point, "you go and tell death for me, I am busy with life."

As someone has commented: "We seem to forget that death itself has been under divine assault for millennia"

It turns out that God is out ahead of us, waiting for *us* individually and *us* the church.

Let's all be drawn forward to this God who showed in Jesus that he understands our fears, and isn't afraid of us. ...Whose good flippancy makes him available to us while we're figuring things out.