

Notes for Next Sunday

Second Sunday in Lent

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Genesis 12:1-9). This narrative is about the calling of Abram by God to leave the country he was living in and go to what was to be the Promised Land. The Lord called Abram out of idolatry (Jsh. 24:2), in which he deserved nothing but condemnation and eternal death. This was not because Abram merited God's favor. Instead, God demonstrated His mercy and grace in calling an idolater, out of pagan surroundings and afflictions, setting him apart from the world of false belief to live by the promise of His grace. By choosing Abram, an idolater, God demonstrated that it is not by works but by grace that we are saved. (TLSB)

Epistle (Romans 4:1-8, 13-17). Luther: "After the first three chapters, in which sin is revealed and faith's way to righteousness is taught, St. Paul begins in chapter 4 to meet certain objections. First he takes up the one that all men commonly make when they hear that faith justifies without works. They say, 'Are we, then, to do no good works?' Therefore he himself takes up the case of Abraham, and asks, 'What did Abraham accomplish, then, with his good works? Were they all in vain? Were his works of no use?' He concludes that Abraham was justified by faith alone, without any works, so much so that the Scriptures in Genesis 15[:6] declare that he was justified by faith alone even before the work of circumcision." (TLSB)

Gospel (John 3:1-17). John 3:1-21 comprises the well-known conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. It has rightly been said that John 3:1-21 contains the whole of Christ's teaching. If we had nothing except these twenty one verses, we would know the way of salvation. One commentator divides these verses thus: In verses 1-10 we have a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. Verses 11-21, beginning with "verily, verily" (the second in this Gospel, the first at 1:51), we have a discourse by Jesus:

1. Verses 11-13, Who Jesus is;
2. Verses 14-17, What He has come to accomplish;
3. Verses 18-21, What the result of His coming will be to men.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Genesis 12:1-9

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ²"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ⁶Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring ^a I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. ⁹Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

12:1 had said. God had spoken to Abram "while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran" (Ac 7:2). (CSB)

12:2–3 God’s promise to Abram has a sevenfold structure. (CSB) The covenant number seven prevails here, even though there is no explicit covenant involved. (Leupold)

12:4 *seventy-five years old*. Although advanced in age at the time of his call, Abram would live for another full century. (CSB)

12:5 *people they had acquired*. Wealthy people in that ancient world always had servants to help them with their flocks and herds. Not all servants were slaves; many were voluntarily employed. (CSB)

12:8 *Bethel*. Just north of Jerusalem, it was an important town in the religious history of God’s ancient people. Only Jerusalem is mentioned more often in the OT. (CSB)

EPISTLE – Romans 5:1-8, 13-17

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”⁴ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

¹³ It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

4:3 credited. Abraham did not act righteously; God declared him righteous because of his faith. “Faith itself is credited for righteousness. Faith is the thing God declares to be righteousness. Paul adds that righteousness is credited freely” (Ap IV 89). (TLSB)

4:13 his offspring. All those of whom Abraham is said to be father (vv. 11–12). – This means all believers throughout history. (CSB)

GOSPEL – John 3:1-17

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” ³ In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” ⁴ “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” ⁵ Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” ⁹ “How can this be?” Nicodemus

asked.¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?”¹¹ I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

3:2 at night. So that his colleagues would not know. John’s presentation of this encounter may symbolize those in the world who come out of evil darkness to Jesus, the light of the world (cf. 3:19-21). (TLSB)

3:3 born again. † The Greek also may mean “born from above.” Both meanings are consistent with Jesus’ redeeming work, and no doubt both meanings are implied here and at v. 7. (CSB)

3:5 the kingdom of heaven. A phrase found only in Matthew, where it occurs 33 times. The kingdom of heaven is the rule of God and is both a present reality and a future hope. The idea of God’s kingdom is central to Jesus’ teaching and is mentioned 50 times in Matthew alone.) (CSB)

3:8 wind. No human being can understand, govern, or control the wind’s movement. Jesus urged Nicodemus to discard his narrowly naturalistic view of human beings, as well as any presumption that they produce new birth. The new birth is an act of God (cf 1:13). (TLSB)

3:14 The bronze serpent was lifted up to make sport of the deadly serpents, as if it were a slain trophy. The Son was lifted up to make a public spectacle of the enemy, as if the defeated devil were on the cross. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)