

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park and Faith Family

Title: Powerlessness, the Path We Have to Walk

Lesson: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 & Mark 8:31-38

Genesis 17 ¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. ²And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” ³Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ⁴“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be Abram but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ¹⁵God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Mark 8 ³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

We have good news. It is that spring is coming; though it's a little cold until tomorrow. It is true that I missed snow and the cold winter when I was in California, but I think that I have experienced Wisconsin's snow and winter enough, so I'm ready to enjoy the warm spring sunshine. God's providence is very surprising. The heat of summer is forgotten by the bitter winter wind. However, we realize that there is a set time for everything, just as cold winter doesn't last forever and eventually turns into spring. It's the same with life. It is hard to imagine the life of old age when people are young. As our lives get closer to death as we greet the new year and new year and new year, we seem to recall where we came from and where we are going. Life and death belong to God and we can never deny it. I would ask you, “How have you been spending this Lent?” Are you spending your days as usual? Or are you focusing on your relationship with God? The Lenten service just began from the past Wednesday and you have five chances left to join in. If you aren't sure how you will spend this season well, joining in the service is a good way to spend this season. I look forward to seeing you all in the service.

Today's scripture and Gospel lesson both indicate the covenant of God and the promise of God. 1 Corinthians 1:27, NRSV, tells, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” God loves weakness and powerlessness so He uses the way of weakness and the way of powerlessness to shame the power of the world.

When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants.” (1-2) “You will be the ancestor of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham, which means Father of Multitude.” (4) Also, God said, “I will make you very fertile. I will produce nations from you, and kings will come from you.” (6) Like this, God made an enduring covenant with Abraham when he was 99 years old and had no children. Can you believe God’s covenant to Abraham, who had no children? God promised to make him the father of multitude when we was 99 years old and had no children. Biologically, people lose the ability to reproduce around the age of 50. God continued: “I will bless your wife, Sarah and even give you a son from her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations, and kings of peoples shall come from her.” (16)

I fully understand why Abraham laughed when he heard God’s words. In our common sense, it seems to be unreasonable, absurd, and even ridiculous. So, he said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” (17) They were in the twilight, not the rising sun in life. They matched the word, powerlessness more than power and new beginning.

There is another powerlessness in today’s Gospel lesson. Jesus knew what sufferings he would face in the near future and he knew he could never deny his death because it was the covenant of God which must be fulfilled. He had no choice but to be powerless in the face of his fate. God, who has the power to achieve everything in the world, brought blessings, mercy and grace to the earth through the way of powerlessness. Therefore God became a little boy. Who can be afraid of a little baby? A tiny little boy is completely dependent on its parents. Henri Nouwen, a Catholic church priest, said “The powerlessness of the manger has become the powerlessness of the cross.” God became a little boy and He was betrayed by his disciples and naked, he couldn’t resist anything, feeling people’s ridicule, whipping, hunger and thirst, and died at the cross. His death and resurrection were the covenant of God to save humans from sins. In our common sense, the death of Jesus, who has the ability to heal the sick and feed the poor, doesn’t make sense, so Peter tried to correct him. But, rather Jesus said “Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.” (33)

Beloved, the way of the world and God’s ways are the opposite. The secular world encourages us to follow power and money, but God tells us that blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, and blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. (Matthew 5:3-10, NRSV)

We know what happened to Abraham and Sarah. They had a little baby when they were 100 years old and 90 years old as God promised, and became the ancestor of many nations and became the father of multitude. Also, what happened to Jesus? He died on the cross, but resurrected from the death after three days. His death and resurrection became the eternal covenant of God that gives life to everyone who believes in it.

Like this, God has chosen the things of powerlessness and works through them. To use Henri Nouwen’s words: “We are poor, gentle, mourning, hungry and thirsty for justice, merciful, pure

of heart, peacemakers, and always persecuted by a hostile world. But we are no weaklings, no doormats! The kingdom of heaven is ours, the earth our inheritance. We are comforted, have our fill, experience mercy, are recognized as God's children and ... see God. That's power, real power, power that comes from above." (Henri Nouwen, *Finding My Way Home*, location 288)

God invites us to the path of powerlessness that changes this world. I hope we walk together along the path of powerlessness during this Lent. I pray God works through us and pray we become candles of light on this difficult time. May we invite the Holy Spirit to the powerlessness of our hearts every day and respond to His invitation. Thanks be to God. Amen.