

Pericope Study for Sunday, August 7, 2016 – Lectionary 19C

Presented Tue 8/2/16 by Richard Burgess

Collect / Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your church. Open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may be ready to receive you wherever you appear, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. (ELW)

Thought Questions for Lectionary 19C:

- What draws you into the future?
- What has God promised you that you hope for? Are afraid of?

Possible Sermon Titles for Lectionary 19C

As usual, use at your own risk.

	Gen	Heb	Lk
Be Alert			X
By Faith	X	X	
Count the Stars	X		
Do Not Be Afraid	X		X
Faith Is . . .		X	
God Wants to Give You the Kingdom, So Give Away Everything Else			X
Heirs of the Promise	X	X	X
Jesus Is a Thief in the Night			X
No Need for Fear			X
Promises, Promises	X		X
Strangers and Foreigners Seeking a Homeland		X	
Where Is Your Treasure?			X
Will God Serve You?			X

Genesis 15:1–6

1 After these things 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.” 2 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?” 3 And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” 4 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.” 5 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.” 6 And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

15.1 *after these things* Context:
Ch 12: God Calls Abram; Abram goes to Egypt & passes Sarai off as his sister, bringing catastrophe on Pharaoh.
Ch 13: Abram & Lot divide the land.
Ch 14: Abram defeats several kings and has a mysterious interaction with King Melchizedek of Salem (Jerusalem).
Note: Abram & Sarai are not Abraham & Sarah yet.

15.2-3 Abram questions God’s promise. Considering that it has been a while since the promise of Ch 12, this seems “reasonable”. (The land without an heir to pass it on to would be of no lasting value. See Gen 12.7.) In what ways do we question God’s promises? What are the consequences of questioning God’s promises? What needs to be done &/o preached in response to help deal with those consequences?

15.5 *Look toward heaven and count the stars . . .* A tangible sign of the promise, though not fulfillment yet. What signs do we have to look to as we wait for God’s promises to be fulfilled?

15.6 The Hebrew is literally, “And he (presumably Abram) believed in YHWH and he credited to him righteousness,” ie, it is not definite as to whether God reckoned Abraham righteous or Abraham reckoned God righteous. What are the differences if each of these are the case? What if both are the case?

15.6 Abram *believed the Lord* What did Abram ‘believe’? “The Lord”? What the Lord said? Does “believe” here mean the same thing as “faith” (Heb 11.1-3, 8-9, 11, 13) in the second lesson? Does it matter that this text uses the verb “believe” while the Hebrews 11 (second lesson) text uses the noun “faith” and mostly as the object of prepositions?

15.6 *reckoned* = credited; “1) to count, compute, or calculate, as in number or amount. 2) to esteem or consider; regard as”. (Dictionary.com) What is counted or calculated? Esteemed or considered? Which apply?

15.6 *Righteousness* “Some interpreters stress righteousness as conforming to a norm, the law, or ‘what is right’. Others see it as relational, fitting the situation.” (*Harper’s Bible Dictionary*) I tend to think in this situation it is relational. Assuming the latter, what is the nature of this righteous relationship? In particular, what does each person (God, Abram / us) bring & take to & from the table?

Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

(11.4-7 pre-Abraham OT examples of faith)

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

13 All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, 14 for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

11.1 *Faith (pistis)* What is “faith”? Is the definition given here satisfactory? Is it a general purpose definition or is it limited to the specific context here?

11.1-3 *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*

There appears to be a sort of concretization of abstract or not-yet-real things. (similarly in 11.3) What is the value of this? Danger? As with “reckoned” in Gen 15.6 above, can “faith” have more than one meaning, eg, both logical and relational ones? Which applies here? Is faith a gift we receive or a response to God’s promises?

11.9-10 *living in tents . . . the city that has foundations* What is the difference between a tent and a city with foundations? What current images might we use for “living in tents” and looking forward to “the city that has foundations”?

15.11-12 What is Sarah’s part in all this?

15.13 *died in faith . . . but from a distance they saw and greeted them.* What promises of God are we likely to “die” without receiving? How can we see and greet them from a distance? What are the values and/or pitfalls of this?

15.14-16 *homeland . . . better country* Abraham’s “reward” was land and descendants through which a great nation would be built (Gen 12.7, 15.2-3). It was dependent on land and descendants. What are the land and descendants of our “better country, that is, a heavenly one,” (Heb 11.16)?

15.17-19 Why has the RCL cut short the Abraham section of the encomium by leaving out the binding of Isaac?

Luke 12:32–40

32 “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

35 “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; 36 be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. 38 If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

39 “But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

12.22-48 This week’s Gospel lesson is taken out of two adjacent larger sections: 12.22-34 on not worrying and 2.35-48 on watchful & faithful slaves. It would seem we have been given representative chunks from the middle. Or, is there more to it than that?

12.32-34 Compare to last week’s parable of “The Rich Fool”.

12.34 Does our treasure follow our heart or our heart follow our treasure? How does this affect the way we do stewardship?

12.35-48 “The reader here not only is mindful of the fact that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem but is also anticipating the Lord’s return.” (Craddock, *Interpretation: Luke*, p 164.2) and “In the context of Luke’s story, only the ignorant and unfaithful are deluded by apparent delay. These are all words to the faithful, revealing Jesus’ sense of determination and alerting the faithful and the reader that the time of the kingdom is already unfolding.” (Tiede, *ACNT: Luke*, p 239.3)

12.37 Does a master serving his slaves seem a little strange? Perhaps a variation on the theology of the cross?

12.39-40 How does one preach Jesus as a thief? In the children’s sermon? ☺

12.35-40 What does it mean to

- “have your lamps lit”? (12.35)
- be “alert” (12.37)
- “let (your) house be broken into”? (12.39)
- “be ready” (12.40)