

Pericope Study for Sunday, March 12, 2017 – Lent 2A

Presented Tue 5/7/17 by Richard Burgess

Collect / Prayer of the Day

O God, our leader and guide, in the waters of baptism you bring us to new birth to live as your children. Strengthen our faith in your promises, that by your Spirit we may lift up your life to all the world through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

General Thoughts, Questions for This Week

How do the themes of calling (Genesis), faith (Romans), and being born of water & the spirit (John) work together? Not?

Abraham figures prominently in both the first and second lessons. Similarly? Differently? Actually, it's Abram in Genesis 12 and Abraham in Romans 4. Does that matter?

"Righteousness" is prominent in the Romans lesson. How is this related to "eternal life", "born from above", etc in the John lesson?

Possible Sermon Titles for Lent 2A

As usual, use at your own risk.

Title	Gen	Rom	Jn
A Blessing for All Peoples	X		
Blessed to Be a Blessing	X		
Get Up and Move	X		
Is Greatness the Same as Blessed?	X		
Considered Righteous		X	
Life to the Dead and Existence to the Nonexistent		X	
Not Righteous, but Considered Righteous Anyway		X	
The Righteousness of Faith		X	
Believe		X	X
Born from Above, of Water and the Spirit			X
Not to Condemn, but to Save			X
Unless You Are Born from Above			X
You Must Be Born Again			X

Genesis 12.1-4a (NRSV)

¹The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

^{4a}So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him.

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

12.1 *Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.* Most of us clergy types have done this. How has this affected our lives? Most of our parishioners have not. How has that affected their lives?

12.1 What does it mean to go *from your country? From your kindred? From your father’s house?* This was necessary for Abraham. Is it for us?

12.2 . . . *so that you will be a blessing.* How can our lives be a blessing to others? What changes when we make / let that happen?

12.3 How does this retributive justice clause affect the promise of the LORD to the world through Abram? How did / does God bless & curse those who bless & curse God’s people?

12.3 *and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* or “by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (NRSV text note) or “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (NIV). Hebrew: בְּרַכְּךָ. So is the blessing done by God or by the families? Does all the translation fuss here matter?

Romans 4.1-5, 13-17 (NRSV)

^{4.1}What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." ⁴Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

¹³For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

4.3-5 *reckoned* = *logizomai* = to count, impute, regard, consider. (from *logos*, "word", from *legō* "to speak") What kind of (alternative?) reality does this reflect?

4.3 *Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.* How does this work? Why is *faith* counted as righteousness and not something else? Are there other things that might also be reckoned as righteousness?

4.3 What is *righteousness*?

4.3, 13 What is this faith that Abraham had?

4.5 *one who without works trusts him . . . such faith is reckoned as righteousness.* Is there a link between *without works* and *trusts*?

4.13-15 *Law* Is there any usefulness to be obtained from the traditional Lutheran 1st & 2nd uses of the law?

4.15 *where there is no law, neither is there violation* How does the law bring violation?

4.16 How are *faith* and *grace* related?

4.16 *guaranteed to all his descendants* How is faith generational? Who are Abraham's *descendants*? Those who share the faith of Abraham? Jews? Christians? Muslims? Other?

4.16 *those who share the faith of Abraham* What does this mean? Is faith in Christ sharing the faith of Abraham?

4.16 *If God gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist,* What needs to be given life or called into existence that is dead or does not exist? Here it says God does that. Do we have a part in that? (I.e., why do we need to hear this verse?)

John 3.1-17 (NRSV)

³Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

¹¹"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Notes, Observations, and Thought Questions:

3.3-10 Some of our parishioners may have had negative experiences with "born again"; a few may have had good experiences they cherish. What does it mean for it to be necessary to be "born from above"?

3.3-8 *born* all are forms of *gennaō* to be born, give birth, beget, bear, produce, etc.

3.3 *no one can see the kingdom of God . . .* What does it mean to "see" the kingdom? How is this the same as / different from eternal life? Salvation?

3.5 *born of water and Spirit* = baptism?

3.8 *wind . . . Spirit* both are *pneuma / pneumatōs*, ie, wind, breath, spirit. IE, essentially the same word.

3.9-10 What are *these things*? What is Jesus' criticism of Nicodemus? Why should Nicodemus already know? Why doesn't he? Are Jesus & Nicodemus talking about the same thing(s)?

3.12 What earthly things is Jesus talking about? Why should that knowledge lead to heavenly knowledge? What are the *heavenly things*?

3.15, 16 *Eternal life* = *zōnē aiōnion*, from *aiōnios* = "indeterminate as to duration, eternal, everlasting" (Perschbacher, *New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, p 10) "1 without beginning . . . 2 without end . . ." (BAGD p 28) (I would suggest "timeless" as a another possible translation.) What does / can "eternal life" mean to people?

3.18-21 Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus actually continues on through verse 21. What are the costs / benefits of reading the extra 4 verses?

Compare & contrast:

3.3 see the kingdom of God

3.3, 7 born from above

3.5 enter the kingdom of God

3.5 born of water and the Spirit

3.15-16 eternal life

3.17 the world might be saved