

## **“I Reckon That’s Righteous”**

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

Feb. 25, 2018 -- 2 Lent

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When 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. {2} And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." {3} Then 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. {5} No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. {6} I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. {7} I 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.

God said to Abraham, "As for Sarah your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. {16} I 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."

Romans 4:13-25

For 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. {14} If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. {15} For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. {16} For 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, {17} as 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. {18} Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." {19} He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. {20} No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, {21} being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. {22} Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." {23} Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, {24} but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who

believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, {25} who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

#### Mark 8:27-38

<sup>27</sup>Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" <sup>28</sup>And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup>He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." <sup>30</sup>And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then 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. {32} He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. {33} But 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." {34} He 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. {35} For 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. {36} For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? {37} Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? {38} Those 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."

There are a lot of characters in the Bible. Some of the heroes of the faith are larger than life people that came from anonymity to a place of remembrance, reverence, legend and lore. In Lent each year we're re-introduced to a couple of the greatest. The champion covenant keepers of God's newly minted people. The dynamic duo who defied time and believed God and from the moment he spoke with them in their Bedouin bedroom they followed him all the way to a promised land.

Abram and Sarai, who before our very eyes in our reading for today become Abraham and Sarah. A couple of old, really old folks who got a bolt of energy, packed their carpet bags, rolled up their Persian rugs, loaded up the two humped camels and fell in line behind God and God's plan. Right behind. Righteously behind.

Listen again to what God tells Abram -- ". . . I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous. . . . As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations."

Here, along the way God gives them new names that basically mean that they are to be the parents, the progenitors of a great nation. A nation that God says will be the nation to bless all other nations. All people. And it all stars with a most unlikely couple having a baby boy.

So here they are Hebrew royalty before there's even a nation to be royal over. And the key is following. Paul, waxing eloquent as he was wont to do says about Abraham when speaking about faith and the law, "For 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. ... For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants...", Paul says, "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness."

Here's the thing. It's why we get a dose of Abraham every Lent. Faith is what makes us follow. Faith comes from God. And faithful following is the key to righteousness. And righteousness means being 'right' with God. Being in correct relationship with God. It doesn't matter if we think we're too old, or too young for that matter. When God calls the idea is to follow.

It's a lesson our dear friend and fisherman Peter has to learn the hard way. He and his mates have been following Jesus for some time. They have been observing him and getting to know him and they know both innately and

by experience that Jesus is special. Really special. So when the occasion arises and Jesus decides to give them their mid-term exam on the road, he asks first who people say that he is. God bless them they give their best Sunday school (shool) answer. "Uh, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." And then in his Jesus way Jesus asks, 'what about you guys? What do you say?' Peter who's not always the first one with his hand in the air gets all excited because he somehow, mysteriously, knows the answer and he says, like he's in seminary or something, "You are the messiah."

Then Jesus, getting to the heart of the lesson for the day, getting to why he's asking these questions that has nothing to do with an ego boost, says, "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." And Peter says, "Uh uh, no you didn't." At which time Jesus, knowing this is a pivotal moment, a disciple making moment, a momentous moment, a faith moment, says, what *sounds* like the harshest kind of rebuke, ""Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Then he goes on, calmly but with intensity, to tell everyone within earshot what the true cost of discipleship is. He explains to them the meat and bones of being righteous before God, of being absolutely committed to God. He tells them, "If any want to become my followers, let

them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For 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.” Save your life, play it safe and lose it. Lose your life and follow Jesus and save it. (Pause)

The next sound you hear is both the utter silence of Peter who is stunned and the other disciples and a few other faithful followers who are trying their best, just like we are, to figure out what that means for us. (pause)

The other sound you hear is mothers calling to their children saying, ‘get your stuff together, it’s time to go home.’ And young men shaking their heads, trying their best to look cool as they shuffle off back to whatever duty they shirked to take a look at Jesus. All ages and all sorts gathering their things together to go home like a crowd, deflated, that just lost the big game. Walking towards a non-existent sign that says, ‘exit’ with lot’s of moaning and groaning and ‘are you kidding me. Nobody said anything about dying.’

When Jesus tells Peter to “get behind me,” he’s not saying don’t hinder me. Not ‘get out of my way. Jesus means literally get behind me. In greek the words are “opizo mou.” Literally ‘come after me.’ Follow me. Become subject to me. Let me determine the way. And then, when Jesus speaks to everybody he uses the same word, if any want “Opizo mou,” to come after me, to be my followers “come after me,” Jesus says, “take up their cross and follow me.”

Which is the real heart of the message of Lent. There is only one way to God. Only one way to righteousness. And that way is following Jesus to the cross.

Let's think about this. It's pretty important. The call to Abraham and Sarah to have this baby is in the big picture a call to be parents to that new nation that will bless all other nations in God's own good time. That time is marked with the birth of another child who we know as Jesus. Again, when Abraham and Sarah, righteous followers, gave birth to a blessing of God to the nations that blessing finds its way through all of those generations of God's people until Jesus.

Now at the pivotal moment in Jesus life and ministry, we here him issue a calling that's just as important that of Abraham who said 'yes' and signed his half of God's covenant. Abram and Sarah, who quite literally **gave up their lives** to follow God's plan. Here in Mark, Jesus, who Peter rightfully named as the messiah. The Christ. The savior of mankind. The king of kings and Lord of Lords. Issues another call, not just to Peter but to all who want to 'come after Jesus.'

For these faith followers the call and challenge is essentially the same. Only the baby that they will help to be born, will nurture, will help God bring into the world will look an awful lot like Jesus because it will be his body – the church. Two callings. One goal. To bless all people. To love all people back

into what? Right relationship with God. I reckon you could call it 'righteousness.'

So, there's a message in this for us right? Otherwise it's just a couple of stories about a two old people having a baby and an embarrassed would be theologian fisherman told by a preacher who get's that look in his eye during lent. There is. If we hear what Mark is telling us the Christian life, this calling, is all about taking up a cross and getting behind Jesus, following Jesus wherever he might lead us. So that we're walking behind him, following him and can focus on – him. Not on me. Not on you. On him. And from behind him (gesture), we can mimic him, if he puts his right foot in so do we, if he stops to help someone we do too, if he feeds someone we do too, if he blesses children we do too, if he takes a little time for prayer we do too, if he binds wounds or heals or cares for hundreds or thousands as his new creation we do too, if he speaks with compassion we do too, if he loves God before anything, and his neighbor as he loves himself even if it means giving up his life – we do too. At least spiritually. He goes, we follow. He does, we do. He loves. So should we. All of this following has a lot of implications for our living. It's lent – we'll give it some thought.

That's it...I reckon that's what we need to know about righteousness.  
.....the wondrous love of Jesus, whom we faithfully follow, bearing our lenten crosses...