

“Flesh”(v. 6) and “spirit” were seen as constituents of life, of which spirit (breath, wind, pneuma) was the life-giving force. Many things can be seen only in their effect; such is birth in the Spirit (v. 8). Still Nicodemus doesn't understand: in order for him to do so, he needs to have faith (“receive our testimony”, v. 11). Then, in v. 12, Jesus says: you, Nicodemus, don't comprehend what can be told in analogies (“earthly things”, i.e. “wind”, v. 8), so how can you possibly believe mysteries? Vv. 13-17 are a monologue. Only Christ has descended and ascended. The “serpent” (v. 14) is mentioned in Numbers 21:9-11: the people were bitten by poisonous snakes; some died; others became gravely ill. Instructed by God, Moses mounted (“lifted up”) a bronze snake on a pole. Those who looked at this emblem (trusting in God) were healed, lifted up, given life. God in his love provides eternal life to all who believe (v. 16). If you wilfully do not believe, you will perish (v. 18); there is no third alternative! God's intention is that you believe, rather than be condemned (v. 17).

~ Notices ~

Ukraine Appeal clareanglicans.ie or: www.christianaid.ie

Turkey and Syria Earthquake relief - Bishop's appeal

– see sheet at back of church for details or go to:

www.bishopsappeal.ireland.anglican.org/give

Living the Questions Course – sign-up sheet in church

Book Club 1st (or 2nd) Tuesday of every month – please ask Sue or Carolyn (St C) or Clare (SP) for details.

Vestry membership - For those not yet on the general vestry list, please complete a form at the back of church if you would like to be part of the church's Easter Vestry.

Meditation- St Columba's – Every Thurs 7.30pm- church room.

Lectio Divina – please let me know if you would be interested in forming a group who would meet to read and reflect upon scripture together. See sign-up sheet.

Prayer Workshop I plan to offer a workshop on prayer during Lent. Could let me know what best suits on the sign-up sheet.

Martin Sheen movie – ‘The Way’. As a Lenten reflection, it is a moving and inspiring film - venue will either be the Rectory or in church depending on numbers. See sign-up sheet.

Confirmation - Please let the Rector know if are thinking of becoming confirmed in 2020 – I have three names so far.

Select Vestry meetings - members will be emailed for agreed dates.

Easter Vestries – we must soon set dates for Easter Vestries.

Website: clareanglicans.ie

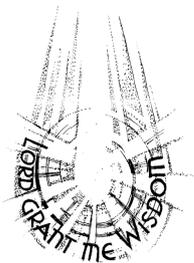
YouTube: www.youtube.com/c/clareanglicans

Facebook: www.facebook.com/clare.anglicans

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2nd Sunday of Lent (Year A)

Readings and Hymns

Collect

Almighty God, by the prayer and discipline of Lent may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings, and by following in his Way come to share in his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Hymns

- 1) 323, The God of Abraham praise
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKAIWQpbSH8>
- 2) 349, Fill thou my life, O Lord my God
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CJT-6nsl8c>
- 3) 303, Lord of the Church, we pray for our renewing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mouj27bFBhk>

Genesis 12: 1-4a

Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I 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.’ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Psalms 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills; ♦
from where is my help to come?
My help comes from the Lord, ♦
the maker of heaven and earth.
He will not suffer your foot to stumble; ♦
he who watches over you will not sleep.
Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel ♦
shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord himself watches over you; ♦
the Lord is your shade at your right hand,
So that the sun shall not strike you by day, ♦
neither the moon by night.
The Lord shall keep you from all evil; ♦
it is he who shall keep your soul.
The Lord shall keep watch over your going out
and your coming in, ♦
from this time forth for evermore.

Romans 4: 1-5, 13-17

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. 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. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. 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, 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.

John 3: 1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He 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.' Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus 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?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The 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.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

'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. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

'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.

'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.

Post Communion Prayer

Creator of heaven and earth, we thank you for these holy mysteries given us by our Lord Jesus Christ, by which we receive your grace and are assured of your love, which is through him now and for ever. **Amen**

Commentary

Genesis 12:1-4a

In a time of migration of peoples about 4,000 years ago, Terah has travelled west with his son Abram, Abram's wife Sarai and his grandson Lot from Ur, near the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Terah and his family settle for a time in "Haran" (11:31), where Terah dies. Abram now comes to centre-stage. God makes a pact with Abram: if Abram will leave behind his land and kin (and his pagan past), and live in "the land that I will show you" (12:1, cease to be semi-nomadic), God will honour him in seven ways: make of him "a great nation" (v. 2), (2) confer favour on him ("bless you") make his name renowned ("great") make him a vehicle of good fortune ("be a blessing"), show favour to those who show him favour ("bless", v. 3), (6) exclude those who show him disrespect ("the one ..."), and as other peoples come to trust in God, they will find themselves similarly blessed. In doing "as the Lord had told him" (v. 4), Abram shows his trust (faith) in God. This covenant marks the start of communal relations with God. Being blessed seven ways is being blessed totally: he, his family and his people. In v. 5, "the land" is identified as Canaan. At Shechem, when Abram erects an altar at a pagan shrine ("the oak of Moreh"), God

promises the land to his descendants. At "Bethel" (v. 8), Abram builds another altar. God is god of the whole land. Abram and his family continue southward in stages and, due to famine, go on to Egypt – to return later.

Psalm 121

Perhaps a pilgrim asks the rhetorical question in v. 1, as he journeys through hill country, where pagan gods were once thought to dwell. He begins to answer his own question (v. 2): his help is from God, the creator. Then another voice, perhaps a priest, continues, telling of God's protection of Israel: God is always vigilantly protecting the way of the pilgrim (v. 3). God is "your shade" (v. 5): he protects him from sunstroke and from moon rays (then thought to be harmful). He protects the faithful "from all evil" (v. 7), throughout their lives.

Romans 4:1-5,13-17

Paul has written that one can attain a right relationship with God through faith, without living by Mosaic law. Now he takes Abraham as an example; he asks: what can we conclude about faith vs. Law by looking at Abraham's life? Judaism claimed that Abraham kept the Law before it was given, that he was godly ('justified', v. 2) because his "works" were in accord with the Law. Paul rejects this claim; rather, it was, as Genesis shows, Abraham's faith which counted for him ("reckoned", v. 3) as godliness. God "justifies the ungodly" (v. 5). For the worker, "wages" (v. 4) are expected, but for one who trusts (with no certainty of reward), such trust counts with God. In vv. 6-9 Paul quotes from Psalm 32 and Genesis, interpreting the verses jointly as showing that those who trust in God obtain his favour, whether they be keepers of the Law or trusters in God. Paul then argues that, because Abraham trusted in God's pact before he was circumcised, Abraham's faith (and not his keeping of the Law) was what counted for him with God (v. 10). Indeed, he says, circumcision was a confirmation of the right relationship he had attained through faith. It made Abraham "ancestor" (v. 11) of all who trust in God, both Jews (v. 12) and non-Jews (v. 11). So, the "promise" (v. 13) that Abraham would be father of many nations ("inherit the world") came as a result of his faith and not his law-keeping. If the only way of achieving union with God is through keeping the Law, faith is irrelevant and the promise to Abraham is nonsense (v. 14). Because it is impossible to keep every law, sin is inevitable; God's response to sin is punishment, breakdown of human relations with God: "the law brings wrath" (v. 15). But for those living by faith, transgression ("violation") of the Law is irrelevant. So a right relationship with God "depends on faith" (v. 16), resting on God's "promise" of "grace", his gift of love – made not only to Jews but also to all those who trust in God, "of many nations" (v. 17). God spoke these words to Abraham; God gives spiritual "life" to the unbeliever; he restored Isaac's life when he was as good as dead; he brought a son "into existence" to Abraham and Sarah, in their old age. They were "fully convinced" (v. 21) that God could do it. If we trust in God and have faith in the power of Christ's resurrection, our trust will count with God too (vv. 24-25).

John 3:1-17

Nicodemus, a prominent Pharisee and teacher, comes to Jesus to ask him questions. He comes secretly ("by night", v. 2) because a man of his stature could not be seen consulting Jesus. He has understood from Jesus' miracles ("signs") that Jesus is "from God". But Jesus (in v. 3) tells him that he has not yet understood the main point: to "see the kingdom of God", spiritual rebirth is required. Nicodemus misunderstands: he thinks that Jesus is speaking of biological rebirth (v. 4). Being "born from above" (v. 3) requires being baptised (v. 5).