

Sermon for Lent 2C
Sunday, March 13, 2022
“Trust in God’s mercy and don’t give up”

Text: Genesis 15:1-12,17-18; Luke 13:31-35

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Holy God,
Holy and mighty,
Holy immortal one,
Have mercy upon us.

The humble words of the *Trisagion* are a plea for God’s mercy. Mercy is the theme of the collect for this second week in Lent, and it is at the heart of what Lent is all about. Mercy is God’s inestimable gift to us. I am always inspired by the words of the evangelist, TD Jakes, who said that mercy is when God doesn’t give us what we deserve. In other words, we humans are imperfect; we sin and we fall short all the time, but instead of immediate condemnation, God spares us and gives us the chance to repent and turn back to him, time and time again.

It is because of God’s mercy that we are even able to make it through Lent. There are many temptations that nibble at our heels and try to distract us or throw us off course. Lent is an opportunity to set things straight and make them right. Lent is meant to break us open and make us vulnerable—vulnerable to ourselves and to God, so that he can mold us and remake us into something better than we were before. Lent is like a spiritual spring cleaning, a cleansing, where we let God help us sweep up the cobwebs, vacuum out the spiritual dust in our hearts and our souls and allows us a fresh new start. We get a second, third, fourth, tenth, hundredth, thousandth, even a millionth chance. That reminder is extremely important as we trudge through the Lents in our own personal lives. I’m not talking about the struggle of your Lenten discipline; I’m talking about the personal struggles that you might be facing today, whether it’s personal, emotional, financial, struggles in your relationships with a loved one, family member, or acquaintance, at any given moment we may have our own personal Lent that we’re facing. The message of God’s mercy gives us the ammunition to press on and get through it. Lent is surmountable with God’s help and our persistence, whether we’re talking about the liturgical season or the Lents in our daily lives.

For starters, God has promised to be faithful to his people. He made that clear to Abram in the story from Genesis when he promised Abram the land of Canaan to possess, then told him, “Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them...So shall your descendants be.” God made a covenant with Abram—more than that, in the Hebrew text, it says that God *cut* a covenant with Abram. God instructed Abram in how to make an animal sacrifice as a symbol that God’s promise was deeper than saying a bunch of words and offering empty promises. In “cutting a covenant” a person symbolically asserts that they will keep their word lest their own body be severed like the animal whose blood they walk through. The spirit of God

passed in the flaming torch through the sacrificed animals. In doing so, he cut a covenant with Abram that he would have biological children and would be the father of many nations “from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates.” Now God’s covenant didn’t mean that Abram or his descendants wouldn’t have troubles. They would eventually find themselves enslaved in Egypt, but God wouldn’t forget them; he delivered them from slavery in Egypt and led them back to the land he promised to their forefather. And even when they lost their way and wandered in the wilderness for forty years, God stuck with them. God persisted...and so did they.

Persistence is at the center of today’s short Gospel, too. Jesus was faced with big struggles, not the least of which came about after he healed a woman with a hemorrhage lasting twelve years, *on the Sabbath*. The healings and the teachings bothered the established religious leaders, but when Jesus had the nerve to do it on the Sabbath, they were about ready to blow a gasket! Word got around and Herod the king wanted to silence Jesus once and for all. The Pharisees told Jesus, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” Look, Jesus, you better stop what you’re doing and run away. You can save yourself that way. Have you ever been in a situation in your life when you thought it would be so much easier if you just ran away and left it all behind? If only there were an easy way out, things would be so much better. But taking the easy way out isn’t the best solution. Jesus wasn’t at all interested in fleeing and trying to save his neck. He knew he had a task to do while here on earth, and he was going to be persistent and carry it out. He had demons to cast out and cures to make today and tomorrow, for on the third day he was to finish his work. What a clever turn of phrase that was! Jesus was talking about his ministry at the moment, but then he slipped in a little foreshadowing of the ultimate work that he was to accomplish by his resurrection on the third day.

That’s a beautiful thing for us to hear: keep pressing on, be persistent through the Lents of life, because what lies ahead is the glory and joy that is Easter. The other lessons that we read this morning all spoke to that message of persistence and encouragement. God told Abram not to give up, because he was going to make him the father of many nations; God had already brought Abram out of the land of Ur to possess a new land for himself and his descendants. The psalm is a powerful reminder that no matter what life throws at us, no matter what others do to us or say about us, no matter what uncontrollable forces show their powerful effects upon us, God is always faithful. The Lord is our light and our salvation; whom then shall we fear? And Paul summed it up when he told the Philippians “to stand firm in the Lord.”

That may not always seem easy to do from day to day, but Lent allows us to slow down a bit, clean out the cobwebs and the dust, and gives us an opportunity to make space for God to come back into our lives—or at least to rediscover him—and help us stand firm for him with penitent hearts and steadfast faith. That will certainly help us

make it in through this life and help us attain everlasting joy in the next one. Trust in God's mercy, and don't give up. Amen.

Resource

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-genesis-151-12-17-18-5#>