

Lent 2A, Hickory Neck Episcopal Church, 16 March 2014
The Reverend Henry P. McQueen
Genesis 12:1-4a; Ps 121; Romans 4:1-5,13-17; John 3:1-17

S.D.G.

One of my Lenten devotions this season has been to watch the video reflections that are being offered by the Society of Saint John the Evangelist. I know that some of you are also enjoying these reflections as you have shared with me some of your own experiences and insights. You can find links to these on the parish Facebook page if you are curious.

On Thursday the reflection was about “Where was God for you today?” Brother Luke commented: “I may sense in the moment, “Oh, look God’s right here. How beautiful that is. Oh, that was a great word.” And then I continue through the day and something else happens and the next task is before me, the next problem, the next worry, the next assignment and if I don’t stop later, it will easily just pass by me what’s happened, what God has given me.”

From that portion of his reflection I heard “*word*” loud and clear. He said “Oh, that was a great *word*.” And that got me thinking. Our collect today petitions God: “Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word...”

“...the unchangeable truth of your word, Jesus Christ your Son”

Hold onto that for a moment, and lets venture to Genesis chapter 1 where we read “Then God said”, God spoke words, “...Let there be light”, “let there be a dome in the midst of the waters and let it separate the waters from the waters”, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear”, “Let the earth put forth vegetation”, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky”... and through God’s words God called the heavens and the earth into being. It was God’s Word at the beginning.

Venturing further to the first chapter of the Gospel of John we hear the familiar poetry “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He

was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it.”... ”And the Word became flesh.”

In the old testament reading today Abram heard God’s word. “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.’” Abram is presented with a difficult charge, he is to leave everything that is valued in his society. He is to leave the comfort of his surroundings for the unknown. And all of this is to be done based upon the promise of being blessed by God. And then we hear somewhat abruptly “So Abram went, as the Lord told him.”

Abram heard God’s word and went. “God said, ‘Let there be light’” and the heavens and the earth were spoken into creation. “And the Word became flesh.” All this occurred through the word of God.

In the Gospel of John, Nicodemus sat at the feet of the Word made flesh but could not understand the words that were spoken. “How can anyone be born after having grown old?” he mused.

I don’t remember my own birth, and that is probably a good thing, but I do remember my son’s birth. Witnessing that birth it strikes me that babies probably don’t want to give up the comfortable surroundings that have nurtured and comforted them for the previous nine months. Why would they give up all that is known and comfortable for the promise of being loved? Similarly we might question why would Abram give up all that is known and comfortable for the promise of being blessed, yet he did so and with significantly less kicking and screaming.

Is this is the message that Nicodemus is missing? That he, and we, are to give up what is known and comfortable for the promise of being loved and blessed. That through God’s Word we are promised eternal life.

Abram did not hesitate, he went as the Lord told him, yet his blessing was not to be realized for a long time. We have God’s word that we will be loved, blessed, and have

eternal life. But sometimes our movement is not so much towards the Cross as away from the Cross.

I wonder if we took time, like Brother Luke suggests, to recognize where God is each day would we more readily believe his word and recognize the Word made flesh around us? Would we be more likely to eschew earthly things for those of heaven? God's word (and Word) is all around us if we but notice. In the sunlight on the leaves, in the face of the person we meet on the street, in our every breath. God's word is right there in our worship: we give thanks when we say "The Word of the Lord", "Thanks be to God". And the Word is before us in the Bread and Wine.

Saint John, in this Gospel passage, references an event of the Exodus found in the Book of Numbers (ch21). The people were mad with both God and Moses for sending them into the wilderness. They complained about the food and water, and rebelled against God. They were overrun with snakes, many dying from their poison. Realizing what they had done the people came to Moses and repented; Moses prayed for the people and God told him to place a serpent upon a staff so that all who see it will live. For a time this bronze serpent, now seen as a symbol for medical doctors, was revered and worshiped. But Jewish scholars of the time knew that it was not the symbol that Moses had placed upon a staff that saved the people; it was through God's word that the people were saved.

The Wisdom of Solomon tells us "For the one who turned toward it was saved, not by the thing that was beheld, but by you, the Savior of all." (16:7)

In the Gospel of John Jesus says "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." And we now make our Lenten journey to the hill where the Word made Flesh was lifted high upon the cross so that all could see God's word and believe, believe so that we may live.

Amen,