**First Reading Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

*As with Noah, God makes an everlasting covenant with Abraham and Sarah. God promises this old couple that they will be the ancestors of nations, though they have no child together. God will miraculously bring forth new life from Sarah’s womb. The name changes emphasize the firmness of God’s promise.*

1When 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. 2And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” 3Then 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. 5No 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.” 15God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16I 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.”

**Psalm 22:23-31**

23You who fear the Lord, give praise! All you of Jacob’s line, give glory. Stand in awe of the Lord, all you offspring of Israel. 24For the Lord does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither is the Lord’s face hidden from them; but when they cry out, the Lord hears them. 25From you comes my praise in the great assembly; I will perform my vows in the sight of those who fear the Lord. 26The poor shall eat and be satisfied, Let those who seek the Lord give praise! May your hearts live forever! 27All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of nations shall bow before God. 28For dominion belongs to the Lord, who rules over the nations. 29Indeed, all who sleep in the earth shall bow down in worship; all who go down to the dust, though they be dead, shall kneel before the Lord. 30Their descendants shall serve the Lord, whom they shall proclaim to generations to come. 31They shall proclaim God’s deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying to them, “The Lord has acted!”

**Second Reading Romans 4:13-25**

*Paul presents Abraham as the example for how a person comes into a right relationship with God not through works of the law but through faith. Though Abraham and Sarah were far too old for bearing children, Abraham trusted that God would accomplish what God had promised to accomplish.*

13The 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. 18Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” 19He 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. 20No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 23Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, 24but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

**Gospel Mark 8:31-38**

*After Peter confesses his belief that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus tells his disciples for the first time what is to come. Peter’s response indicates that he does not yet understand the way of the cross that Jesus will travel.*

31Jesus 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.32He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33But

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.” 34He 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. 35For 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. 36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38Those 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.

**Sermon**

Last week, we had Lent Temptation Story Number 1. This week, based on something fascinating I read about this passage, I’m gonna say that we have Lent Temptation Story Number 2. Last week, we had the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, which is the story assigned for the 1st Sunday in Lent every year. That story in Mark’s gospel was told in only 2 verses…we basically heard that the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, and he was tempted there, but the angels served him. This is in contrast to the way that this story is told in Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels, which contain details about Jesus’ conversation with Satan, the Tempter, and the kind of temptations that Jesus faced. Those details were left out of the much briefer account in Mark’s gospel.

When we get to this passage from Chapter 8, however, we can also witness Jesus being tempted. This time, it is through his disciple Peter that the temptation is presented. It might be difficult for us to associate Peter with the Tempter, with Satan because we can easily understand Peter’s position. We know what it is like to not understand matters of faith. We know what it is like to not want to see a beloved friend hurt or worse. We know what it is like to not want to deal with any more trouble in our lives than absolutely necessary.

We need to understand that, when Jesus says to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan,” he is not saying that Peter is evil. The name “Satan” means “tempter,” and what Peter is doing is tempting Jesus to take an easier path for himself. But Jesus didn’t come to live the easy life. Jesus came to fulfill God’s purposes of him for the sake of US, for the sake of all of humanity. In the verses preceding today’s passage, Peter correctly identifies Jesus as the Messiah, the Son

of the living God. In Jewish belief, the Messiah was the anointed one that God would send to save God’s people. But the way in which Jesus would save all people was different from the way many, including Peter, expected.

The expectation was that the Messiah would come in and use the power of God to overthrow human oppressors, like the Roman Empire and some of the religious leaders who were using their religious authority to oppress. But in this passage, Jesus presents a different way. And Jesus is committed to a different way, a way that was going to result in his suffering and death on a cross. The cross was probably the most common and most public way of executing people in those days. And Jesus already knew that there were some powerful religious leaders who were not crazy about him and what he was doing.

But Jesus approach was to care for those people who were considered the least, the least powerful, the least regarded, the least valued. His time, energy, and power were used for this purpose alone. He would not challenge humanity by using his power. Jesus came to bring love, he came to bring healing, he came for reconciliation and renewal. Using his power to best humanity, exercising power through violence would never bring about any of that, would never express the kingdom of God. Instead, Jesus came in humility, in service to those he had a hand in creating. Jesus gave his life in service to those considered least in the eyes of humanity, and he laid down his life for the salvation of all of humanity. THIS is the way of God, the way of Jesus. Any other way is the way of human beings.

Peter was tempting Jesus to embrace the way of human beings, not the way of God. And, in rebuking Jesus, Peter forgot his place. In his fear and anxiety about what Jesus was saying, Peter forgot that he had been called to follow Jesus, not to lead Jesus. When Jesus says, “Get behind me, Satan,” he not only calls him Tempter, but he reminds Peter that, as disciple, his place is to follow Jesus. That’s when Jesus continues his teaching…any who want to follow Jesus must deny themselves, take up their cross, lose their life, follow Jesus.

Christ’s death on the cross is central to our lives as his disciples because it is through his cross that we are saved from sin and death. It is also central because Jesus took up his cross as an act of service to all of humanity. The life of all of us who are saved by the cross is a life of service, not to ourselves but to the least among us. Christ’s death was both a saving act and an example. His disciples did not all literally go out, find a cross and get crucified alongside Jesus.

Instead, by the power of his resurrection, they and all of us are transformed into workers of his kingdom, into servants of the world.

We can easily fall into the same trap as Peter. We are often more comfortable with human ways than God’s ways, more comfortable trying to stay one-up on everyone rather than humbling ourselves. This is actually a great temptation of the church today. For example, when a church starts to struggle financially, it is easy to start considering what kind of gimmicks we can develop to bring in more money by bringing in more people. While we do want to invite more people, it’s a gimmick if the primary focus is bringing in money.

It is also tempting to try to meet the need of what people want to hear or to try not to make anyone mad. Peter didn’t want to hear Jesus talk about suffering and dying. It made him anxious. Sometimes hearing about Jesus’ ways, which are very different from our ways, is going to make us anxious and uncomfortable. Is it exciting, inspiring or uncomfortable to think of the church, Jesus’ disciples as servant of the world? Maybe it’s all of the above. It may even be uncomfortable to serve the least of these in our society. But Jesus tells us, “Follow me.”

We are living in a time when some churches and Christian leaders are really crossing the line on embracing humanity’s ways rather than Christ’s ways…teaching that following Jesus means success in life and economic prosperity, encouraging the use of violence, affiliating too closely with partisan issues, seeking to use power to control people’s lives. Today’s passage lifts up for us the reality that it is difficult to follow the ways of Jesus, and it is easy to give in to the temptation to do it humanity’s way.

But Christ’s teaching on the cross in today’s passage, which foreshadows his death and his resurrection, lift up to us the more powerful truth that it is only God’s ways, followed perfectly and obediently by Jesus that saved Peter, saved his disciples, saves all of us from sin and death. Humanity’s ways do no save us. Christ’s act of denying himself and taking up the cross is what saves us all. His resurrection puts the exclamation point on this truth.

Nothing is more powerful, more life-giving than God’s ways. Wealth, violence, politics and power are not inspiring. God, coming into this world through Jesus to die for us rather than to fight us…that is a powerful gift to us, a poignant truth, that God, through Christ, does for us what we never would have dreamed of doing for others. And now Christ calls us, not to

die for others, but to live for others, to follow Christ in works of love, healing, reconciliation, and renewal for a world terribly broken by human ways. Amen.