

LFLF – Lent 2 – March 13, 2022

Today we have 2 images of God that seem contradictory. Yet both images are necessary for us to hold in our minds and hearts through this Lenten Journey.

In Genesis 15 we meet an anxious and frustrated Abram. This man who heard the voice of God call him and Sarai out of their homeland to travel west into the land of Canaan. It was not all peace and joy. In fact it was at times very frustrating. God didn't exactly show up every day – or even every decade for that matter. Now Abram and Sarai were old, very old - so where was the promised offspring? Was poor old Abram victim of some cosmic joke?

But then, one night, Abram heard a voice and saw a vision. A word of promise was given that an heir would come – and not just one – but behold the night sky – can you count the stars, Abram? Well, don't bother because your heirs will outnumber the stars.

Abram believed and it was counted to him as righteousness – a verse dear to Paul, Luther and Calvin. Justification by faith was also written across the sky.

Abram believed and, according to God's command, prepared a sacrifice. The vision continued as God entered into a sacred covenant with Abram and his heirs forever.

The God of Creation – in all God's glory and mystery – joins his dream with the heart of a very mortal human, called Abram – soon to be renamed Abraham with Sarah.

You, me, all who worship this God in faith live within this eternal covenant of promise.

Bring your gaze down from the sky to the earth – probably a rather dry patch in the back country called Galilee, within an occupied nation called Israel, and we find Jesus of Nazareth at a turning point in his ministry.

Who was this person? A miracle-worker, a prophet, fearless in his criticism of the temple cult, devoted to the outcast and forsaken. This day he was warned by some of those he often argued with – some Pharisees – who told him to get out of town as Herod was out to get him.

So we move from contemplation of the mysteries of God to consider a contest between the fox and the hen. We already know who wins these contests.

The Old Fox – Herod. Not Herod the Great, the one who killed the newborns of Bethlehem to make sure no challenge to his throne should survive. But a son of Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded and was wary of this one called Jesus.

(I don't know if you ever saw a production of Jesus Christ Superstar, but there is that scene where Herod is anxious to meet Jesus – he sings a little ditty in which he invites Jesus to walk across his swimming pool – do a few miracles, show his stuff. In reality, Herod was afraid of Jesus and deferred his final judgement on Jesus, (the old fox chickened out we might say,) giving that duty to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Court.)

But today he was angry – the wily fox was out to get this uppity prophet.

What is your image of God? Pure light? Like Isaiah's vision of God's majesty? If your image is from the creation, then surely a Lion or an Eagle – but how about a hen?

When I was young, we kept chickens on the farm. They were skittish creatures easy to ignore – except when you tried to move towards their nests or steal an egg. Then you met your match – you had to be careful with a wary hen.

Jesus compares himself to a mother hen facing danger, opening her wings to protect her little ones. She will die before she will release those in her care.

It is a very feminine image of God – not the strutting rooster doing his coca doodle-doo – and running away - but the fierce loyalty of a mother protecting her little ones, even to death.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem – can God cry?

God brought from Abraham and Sarah's faithfulness a nation – a covenant people – a people who went into Egypt for food and ended up slaves. A people God called through Moses to liberation and a new land.

God who gave them a Law and renewed the Covenant of Promise.

God who gave them a land.

God who called the people to trust and renewal through the words of the Prophets.

The God of our longings, who we meet in the poetry and beauty of the Psalms.

The God who gave himself, in the Son, to become one of us that we might understand, believe, change.

Now, this one we call Son of God is looking towards God's City – weeping.

Is this also what God is like?

People look at the war in the Ukraine and ask, “Where is God in all this?”

There will be faithful people this very moment in Ukraine, Yemen, or Ethiopia or Afghanistan or Myanmar – or nursing a sick child, or getting a diagnosis of grave illness, asking the same question.

Yet in the horror are people who are risking their lives for others, who share their last loaf, who minister to the wounded, who nurse until burn out, who weep with those who weep. Is God not there?

Lent calls us to faith in the God of Life, the God of promise, the faithful God who keeps her promises. We cannot manipulate this God, but we can behold God’s glory as we gaze across the waters, behold the new leaf on the tree, the blossoms breaking through the cold earth, in the breath of a newborn child.

This mystery of the Divine, the Grandeur of God, beyond the farthest star and as close as our heartbeat.

Lent calls us to faith in the One who eschewed power or privilege and lived a simple life dependent on the generosity of people like us. The One who wept for his people and went in faith to the City of God where the powers decided he did not fit the requirements of the position as advertised.

Lent throws us into the mystery of life – of God’s and our own.

Look up to the stars, look out to the other, look into your heart – God is there, God is here.

And look to the victim of war, of hatred, of drugs, of racism, of sexism, of poverty, of tyranny – and know that Jesus also weeps - and calls us to minister by his side.

As we ponder both the majesty of creation and the misery of many who walk this earth - and ponder our own faith and failings - may we ever confess this deepest mystery: **“Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!” The One who heals us and grants us peace.**

Amen.