

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Intro

Our OT readings during Lent focus on God's great saving acts in history, leading to God's greatest saving act in Jesus.

Last week, we heard about God's Covenant with Noah—that God would never again destroy the earth.

It was an everlasting Covenant—made with all creation—that was extended to future generations— “I will be your God and you will be my People.”

## I. Abraham

A. Today, we hear that Covenant renewed with ABRAHAM as God promises him that he would be “exceedingly numerous.”

1. Now, if we look at this story closely, we will notice that God makes this Covenant with **whom**—ABRAM.

2. God appears to ABRAM and says, “I know you are righteous—I will make my Covenant with you,” and promises ABRAM that he will be the FATHER OF MANY NATIONS.

3. And the sign of this Covenant—remember, every Covenant is sealed with a sign—the sign of this Covenant will be the birth of ISAAC in ABRAM'S old age.

4. God even goes so far as to give ABRAM a new name—he is now to be called ABRAHAM—which means “*father of multitudes*.”

5. Remember, a person's NAME was a very significant thing in the OT—it was who you were—and this name change is an indication of the profound change in ABRAHAM'S destiny.

6. Not only is ABRAM's name changed, but his wife's as well—as she becomes known as SARAH, which means “*princess*” as she shall give rise to nations.”

B. And even though this seemed impossible—after all, the reading says ABRAHAM was **99 years old**—ABRAHAM responds to God with RADICAL FAITH; and the promise is fulfilled when Sarah gives birth to their son Isaac.

1. ABRAHAM believed God, and his FAITH, according to St. Paul in our NT reading, was what brought this Covenant to fruition.

2. Paul writes, “*Hoping against hope,*” ABRAHAM becomes the father of many nations.

3. He goes on to say that ABRAHAM is the Father of all who come to trust in God.

4. Paul says that ABRAHAM was so sure of the fulfillment of God's promises that he did not waver, but—as Paul puts it—“*grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.*”

5. For Paul, this same saving righteousness is also granted to the followers of Jesus who believe in God *as the one who raised Jesus from the dead.*

## II. Gospel

A. And being followers of Jesus is what our Gospel reading is all about.

1. Here, sandwiched between Peter's Confession and the Transfiguration—is Jesus' first prediction of his Passion.

2. Each of the three Passion Predictions in Mark's Gospel follow the same pattern:

- the Prediction
- followed by MISUNDERSTANDING by the Disciples
- that leads to a TEACHING on DISCIPLESHIP
- and finally, an EXTRAORDINARY EVENT—in this case the Transfiguration, that we heard about 2 weeks ago.

B. Following Peter's Confession "You are the Christ," Jesus tells his Disciples what will happen to him:

- *"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the Chief Priests and the Scribes, and be killed and after three days rise again."*

1. Now this did not set well with Peter at all, what could Jesus possibly be thinking?

2. The Messiah was supposed to be a great and powerful leader—he's not supposed to die.

3. I mean, who wants to follow a Messiah who's going to suffer?

4. It goes against the grain to be followers of a Messiah who suffers instead of producing spectacular victories by the effortless exercise of power.

- What good is that?

5. And besides, if the Messiah has to suffer, it means that His followers will probably have to suffer too—**and who wants that?**

6. So, Peter tries to talk some sense into Jesus:

- He says, "Jesus, didn't you hear what I said?"

- "You are the Messiah—the all-powerful one."

C. And Jesus turns on Peter and says, "Get behind me, Satan!"

1. Whoa, where did that come from?

- Did Peter push a button, or what?

- It seems so out of character for Jesus to climb down Peter's throat like that.

2. Jesus then accuses Peter of thinking in human terms rather than in God's terms.

- He says, *"You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."*

3. Peter really did hit a raw nerve with his rebuke—for he was **tempting** Jesus just as Satan had done in the wilderness.

4. Jesus didn't want to suffer and die any more than you or I would.

5. But, here, once again, Jesus is being tempted to think that He can avoid suffering, rejection and death—that God’s rule means power without pain, glory without humiliation.

6. How often are WE like Peter?

- How often do we TELL God how to do things OUR way, instead of listening for God’s way?

- How often do we focus on the way of power, instead of God’s way of love?

7. But Jesus didn’t choose the way of power, instead he chose the cross.

D. So why did he?

- Why didn’t Jesus use His powers to influence people rather than accept the cross?

1. Because if Jesus didn’t choose the cross—that would mean that there was a limit beyond which the **love of God** would not go.

2. But Jesus DID accept suffering and the cross in order to save US and to offer a way to everlasting life with God.

3. Jesus tells his Disciples that he is destined for an **execution** rather than a **coronation**.

4. And he goes on to say that to be His disciples means that WE will have to face suffering and trials too.

### III. Lent and Us

A. Jesus says, *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”*

1. To deny ourselves means to say NO to ourselves and YES to God  
- not just during Lent, but always.

2. We must say NO to our own natural love of ease and comfort—to everything that puts us first ;  
- and YES to the call of God in our lives.

3. Jesus puts it this way, *“For 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.”*

4. No one can pretend that this is easy;

- We are all afraid of pain and suffering, and “ashamed” of being thought FOOLS by our friends.

5. But that is the choice we are offered;

- We can cling to ourselves—or we can DENY ourselves and cling to Jesus.

6. We can live our lives for this world or for the next.

- The choice is up to us.

B. Lent is a time for following—for trial in the wilderness.

1. Lord knows we’ve certainly had enough times of trial in the wilderness this past year.

2. But Lent also calls us to look at ourselves honestly—to see Jesus and to follow him—to recommit to the journey.

3. We are God’s Covenant people:

- people whom God has love and redeemed,

- people for whom Jesus suffered—died—and rose again.

4. And we who are the Lord’s Covenant People are called to follow Jesus—which involves a willingness to lose even our lives for the sake of the Gospel.

C. So, what does it mean to be a Disciple—to be a follower of Jesus—to act selflessly, sharing the suffering of Christ?

1. How can we renounce the life of this world for the sake of Jesus’ message?

2. I mean, this is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century—we can’t just cash in our chips and run off to a secluded monastery—or become a hermit in the desert.

3. How can we do this and still live in OUR time and space?

4. And the answer is to simply be **more Christ-like**.

- Even in these times of pandemic and “safer at home,” we can still work to live a more Christ-like life.

5. This Lent—perhaps the question for us to ponder is: How are we called to be more Christ-like?

6. Jesus says that those who would follow him must imitate his life by denying **selfish aims**;

- and be prepared to lose their lives in this world;

- and take up the cross.

7. These are the teachings at the heart of Mark’s Gospel—and at the heart of Discipleship as well.

## Conclusion

And the answer is as simple as a typo.

As I went to type that we “need to be prepared to lose their lives” my finger slipped—and I got “Love.”

And that’s the key— isn’t it?

The way we deny ourselves—is to love others.

The way we lose our lives—is to focus on the lives of others more.

The way we take up our cross—is when we live this life of Christ-like love—a life focused on others and serving those who are in need.

This Lent and always—may **WE deny** ourselves—and with the faith of Abraham—**take up our cross** and follow on the way that leads to newness of life.

## Let Us Pray

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first He suffered pain, and entered not into glory before He was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. AMEN.

(Monday in Holy Week)