

March 16, 2025
The Second Sunday in Lent
Year C
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Luke 13:31-35
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Promised

There's an online subscription resource that we use here at Emmanuel called *Sundays and Seasons* to help us prepare for worship every week. It's published by the Lutheran publishing house, Augsburg Fortress, and it includes the contents of all of the Lutheran worship books, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, the red hymnal we have in our pews, *With One Voice*, the blue hymnal we have in our pews, the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the green hymnal that used to be in our pews for many, many years, before we switched to the red hymnal, *This Far By Faith*, an African Descent hymnal, *Libro de Liturgia y Cantico*, a Spanish hymnal, and *All Creation Sings*, a new hymnal supplement that was published in 2020. *Sundays and Seasons* contains readings, prayers, and liturgy for every Sunday and festival day in the church year and hymn suggestions for every Sunday and festival of the year. It also contains commentaries on the readings and themes for all of the Sundays and festivals as well.

Sundays and Seasons is published as a website, but it's also published as a book, which means that the content for it has to be prepared well in advance, so that the books can be sent out before the beginning of a new liturgical and lectionary year. The current edition, for lectionary year C and the liturgical year that began on the first Sunday of Advent in 2024 was published on April 15, 2024. Its early publication date means that some of the commentaries in *Sundays and Seasons* read like something that came out of a time capsule. The world changes, with every day, every week, every month that passes by and words that were

written in early 2024 or even late 2023 sometimes don't seem to have their finger on the pulse of what is going on today.

And yet, while I was thinking how some of the *Sundays and Seasons* materials that were published in April 2024, less than a year ago, feel a little bit out of date, it occurred to me that just about every week of the year, I stand up here and preach a sermon on writings that are a whole lot older than April of 2024. No one knows for sure when the book of Genesis was actually written down, but the stories that appear in Genesis were certainly well in circulation by the time of King David, 1000 B.C. and probably much earlier. The gospel of Luke was probably written between A.D. 70-80, so almost 2000 years ago. Talk about a time capsule of stories and faith.

Of course, Genesis and Luke and the rest of the Bible have the benefit of being scripture, so they carry with them the breath of the Holy Spirit, to bring them to life in our lives, but still, they're pretty old stories. And yet, they have meaning for us today.

Think about Abram, who is also known to us as Abraham, after he is given a name change by God, later in his story. Perhaps we can understand how Abram felt, when years and years, decades had gone by since he packed up his household and left his homeland of Ur and followed the guidance of God to a new and promised land. He had waited and waited and waited for the fulfillment of God's promises in his life, and while he had grown richer through his travels around Canaan, he had no son and he had no settled land.

The passage from Genesis that is our Old Testament reading from today is that second time that God made the promise to Abram that he would receive great rewards for his faithfulness. But Abram's response was that he still had no child, no son to inherit his riches, no child to inherit the land that God had promised. The promised offspring, the great nation did not appear to be forthcoming. How long, Abram must have wondered, was he supposed to wait, supposed to keep believing?

Have you ever wondered about that for yourself or for our world? After all, we follow a God of peace, a God who wept over the violence of Jerusalem, the city of peace, where prophets were killed and God's messengers were stoned to death. The city where Jesus himself was threatened by that fox, Herod, and ultimately killed by the power of empire in bed with religion.

And here we are 2000 years later and the descendants of Abram and his sons Ishmael and Isaac are locked in a battle to the death, where no one is safe or considered to be a non-combatant, not babies, not children, or not teenagers, not young men, not old men, not young women, not old women.

We follow a God of peace, yet we live in a world of violence and terror, where might is seen as right, or might is at least victorious.

We follow a God of love and compassion and yet we live in a world where both of those things seem to be out of fashion.

God has made covenant promises to us, in the words spoken over us in baptism, and yet, sometimes it can feel like life is just not going smoothly for us or for those we love.

Now, to be clear, I have never been one who has believed or preached that a sign of God's presence or blessing in your life is how smoothly your life goes, but still, sometimes it feels like it would be nice to catch a break.

As you all know, Cyrus has had a tough year, health-wise. From a diagnosis with a hereditary blood disorder last June, a gift of his mother and grandmother, to an enlarged spleen that disrupted his ability to play sports and even go to school this fall, to surgery to remove said spleen in December, to flu that required a trip to the emergency room a couple of weeks ago, to a cold that kept him home from school for a couple of days last week, he's had, we've all had, a lot of disruption to the normal flow of life this year. But this weekend, it seemed like things were getting back on track. He was healthy enough and ready to play in his first soccer game

since last fall this weekend, a tournament game for his club team. He played a great game, on defense, and his team won 5-nothing.

But then, in the second half, after he had been on the bench for a few minutes, he went back into the game in the midfield. He played for a little while and then went crashing to the ground, clutching the back of his leg. He came up limping and had to be helped off the field by his teammates. It's a hamstring injury that will probably require physical therapy and that will certainly keep him out the rest of the tournament. The kid just can't catch a break.

Of course, I know that's not how it works, but maybe when life is going like that for you, where it feels like everything is going wrong, you can understand how Abram felt.

Now, of course, Abram had bigger problems. He had no son, he had no place to call home, and his patience was growing thin. When would God's promises be fulfilled in his life? He had been patient. He had been obedient. He had listened and believed in the word of the Lord his God.

And in today's reading, we find God doubling down on the promises he made to Abram, telling him that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, uncountable, and then promising Abram the land as a possession.

Then God makes a covenant with Abram in what might seem to us to be a strange way, a way that involved animal sacrifices, deep darkness, and a smoking pot and a flaming torch passing between the sacrificed animals. It's a time capsule, a vision of an oath making ritual in the ancient world.

During the past two weeks, while they have been home on break I have taken Abigail and Julia to get their passports renewed in hopes that they both have some international travel coming in their near futures. During the process of exchanging paperwork with the staff at the library, which is where we went to process their passport renewals, they were asked to raise their right hands and swear that the information in the documents that had been filled out with their information was

true to the best of their knowledge. The whole thing seemed kind of archaic to me, that they would have to take some kind of oath to confirm that they had filled out a form correctly and honestly. Not as archaic, of course, as sacrificing animals, cutting them in half, and then having a flaming pot pass between them, but still, in the Old Testament and in my regular life, the rituals of oathtaking, of promise making, of covenant making seemed a little old-fashioned to me.

But while I'm confident that Abigail and Julia were being truthful when they attested to the accuracy of the information in their passport renewal forms, we know that human beings aren't always trustworthy in the oaths or covenants that they make.

In today's Old Testament reading, it wasn't a human being, it wasn't Abram making the covenant. He was asleep, when God made the covenant with him, the passing of the fire pot and the flame between the sacrificed animals. And God's promises were true. Abram had sons and settled in the land and experienced God to be a promise keeper.

And we, who yearn for God's presence, who yearn for God's peace, in our lives, in our world, someday, though we might have to wait in patience and faith, like Abram, someday we, who walk by faith and not by sight, will experience the truth of God's promises. Amen.