

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 12:1-8

God gave to Abraham wonderful blessings, but his descendants missed one of the most important. God said, "... And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; *and so you shall be a blessing;...*" Much of the rest of the Old Testament is the story of how God's people accepted and doted on the blessings that had to do with their wealth, power, property, and fame, but failed to be a blessing to those around them. They failed to spread the good news of a God who cared, and instead depended upon God to only be the Warrior King Who would destroy any who opposed them. God is indeed a just God, Who often used supernatural means of protecting His people, but what of the God of the Old Testament Who loved His creation then every bit as much as He did in New Testament times? When the walls of Jerusalem were crushed in 586 B.C., the people were astonished—how could their Warrior God have let them fail? Their prophets had warned them that a cruel and selfish people would be chastised by God, not blessed.



By the time of Jesus' ministry, the Jewish religious leaders firmly believed that salvation should not even be offered to anyone but themselves. They had shut themselves off from the world, behind the walls of their heritage. How might their history have been different if they had listened to the part of God's blessing in which He said, "And so you shall be a blessing"?

The most important part of the blessings bestowed by God in these passages is the promise of Jesus—"And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The immediate descendants of Abraham just didn't understand how the love of God could be for *all* of the people and not just themselves. Today, do we understand how the blessings of God upon ourselves and our country are to be used? Or are we like the Old Testament family of God—enjoying, but not sharing? Praise God that the greatest of the blessings, Jesus, has covered us with His gift of Salvation for all people!

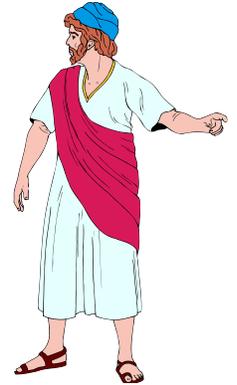
Renew your walk with Christ through a Bible study this week!

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 12:1-8

1. Abram is first introduced in Genesis 11:26ff. Who is his father? Who is his wife? Who is Lot? How did they get to Haran? Are there any other interesting background details?
2. It is suggested that God's promise (vs. 2-3) to Abram is sevenfold. Can you find the seven promises? Consult a Concordia self-study Bible for the details and for information on how this promise continued to be shared.
3. What is Abram's response to God's words and actions in vs. 7 and 8? What is the example for us?
4. How does Hebrews 11:8 explain Abram's response to God's request? What is the example for us?
5. Today's Epistle lesson (Romans 4:1-5;13-17) also celebrates Abram's response. How was God's grace evident in Abram's life? How is God's grace evident in your life?
6. Perhaps the names "Abram" and "Sarai" are not as familiar to us. How do their names become the more familiar "Abraham" and "Sarah"? (See Genesis 17:5 and 15) What is the significance of the name change?



Second Sunday In Lent

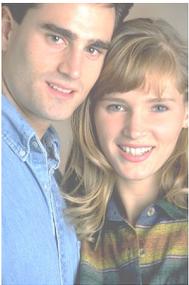
Text: Genesis 28:10-22

One of the painful contemplations of Lent is our own unworthiness. We live in a culture that teaches that everyone should get what they deserve, and that everyone deserves to have the best, but down deep we really don't believe it. We don't believe it because our culture also teaches us that we should earn our way into a better life. So how do we deal with this dilemma of living in a culture that says we all deserve the "good life" and at the same time says that we all have to work to get the "good life," while in God's eyes, neither view is correct? God would say that none of us deserves anything but His anger and that none of us can work our way into His kingdom.

Jacob is a pretty good example of how God works with the problem of our "worthiness." You remember Jacob—he's the guy who tricked his brother out of the family inheritance, deceived his father, and ran from his troubles. After his encounter with God in today's lesson, he managed to wake up with the wrong wife and raise a totally dysfunctional family. Yet God blessed him.

Why would God ever choose to bless Jacob? Not a question that we can answer by formula. There is no $A+B=Blessing$ tool by which we can receive God's blessing. Hebrews says that Jacob and the other Old Testament leaders lived by faith, but even living by faith didn't make Jacob worthy in the sense of being good enough to deserve blessing.

The most wonderful blessing from God is our salvation in Jesus Christ, and the dilemma of our worthiness for the blessing is solved by Jesus Himself—Romans 5:8 says "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." He did not wait for us to deserve salvation. Even the faith by which we live is a gift from Him.



As we live in our unbelieving culture this Lenten season, let's reach out to that culture and share the love of Christ with its members, recognizing that none of us can be saved by our own worth, but only by God's mercy and grace.

Studying God's word is easier with friends. Join a Bible study group!
A message from your District Education Committee

Second Sunday In Lent

Text: Genesis 28:10-22

1. Last week (Genesis 22) we were introduced to patriarchs _____ and _____. Today's lesson introduces us to the third generation of the family _____. What was special about this family?
2. Review Genesis 27. Why was Jacob on the run?
3. What promises does God make to Jacob (vs. 13-15)? Why is this repetition of Genesis 12:3 significant?



4. What was "awesome" (vs. 17) about the place where Jacob had slept?
5. How does Jacob's dream become reality for all believers (See John 1:51)?
6. Are there any special times and places where God's presence was "awesome" for you (the sanctuary, the Lord's Table, etc.)?

Second Sunday in Lent

Jeremiah 26:8-15

Jeremiah followed God's instruction and was arrested. He was almost executed. Surely the intervention of God into the hearts of the court officials and Jeremiah's highly placed friends saved his life. The prophet's message was worth his life. Later in the chapter another prophet of God, Uriah, is mentioned. He was executed for the same work that Jeremiah was doing. Why was the message of repentance so important that it was even worth the lives of the prophets?

Probably nothing is more difficult to overcome than an unrepentant heart. The people of Jeremiah's time had decided that they could not be wrong; God could not bring punishment on them. The same unrepentant hearts were present during Jesus' ministry. The religious leaders of His time were convinced of their own innocence, which they had established by their own power. To protect their belief they killed the Son of God.

An unrepentant heart is angry and defiant, running further and further away from God as the truth becomes more and more apparent to them through the witness of others and the Holy Spirit. Is it any wonder that Jeremiah's prophecy that their own sin would bring the destruction of the holy city drove his enemies to demand his life?

What about our own hearts? Is there any one of us that has not felt defensive or angry upon being challenged about our actions? Actions that, at best, could not have been said to represent the love of Christ? A number of years ago there was a sweet Christian lady who had decided that since she was a believer, she no longer sinned. She shared this with her fresh-out-of-seminary pastor who corrected her, saying that we all are sinners. One word led to another until her face was red with rage, whereupon her pastor said, "Isn't anger at your pastor and friend a sin?" She stormed out of the room, still sinless in her own eyes.



In this season of Lent perhaps we should ask God to show us our hearts; ask Him to make us aware of our protected sins, and enable us to turn our hearts toward Him to be cleansed and renewed daily.

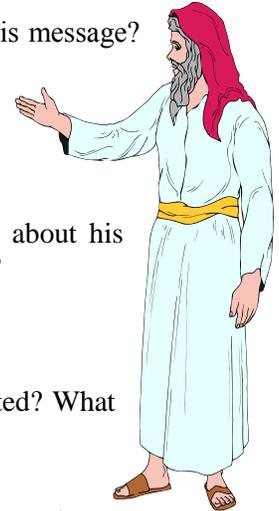
Is Bible study a part of your day?

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

Second Sunday in Lent

Jeremiah 26:8-15

1. Read Jeremiah 26:1-7. Who had given Jeremiah his assignment? How is it made clear that Jeremiah is giving a message from the Lord?
2. How did Jeremiah's audience respond to his message? What sentence was pronounced?
3. Read vs. 13-15. Was Jeremiah concerned about his own welfare? What was his major concern?
4. Read ahead to vs.16. Was Jeremiah executed? What deterred the extreme action?
5. Jeremiah issued God's call for repentance. Lent is a time of repentance. Who are God's spokespersons for repentance in your life? Are you listening?
6. Jeremiah experiences again the difficulty of being God's spokesman (especially) when there is a word of judgment. Have you ever been persecuted or rejected for your faith? What assurances do we have when we follow God's commands?



Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 12:1-8

What was life like four thousand years ago when God told Abram to move to an unknown land? Sometimes we are tempted to think of the people of those days as poor and uneducated, herding sheep or farming rocky soil with primitive tools, living in tents and caves, and unaware of anything resembling what we would call “normal” life today. This, however, was not the case for Abram and his neighbors.

Abram grew up around the area of Ur in Mesopotamia. People there were players of intricate games using boards with “pawn” pieces and pyramid-shaped dice. Many lived in multi-story houses surrounding patio gardens; worshipped their moon god at a great ziggurat towering above the city. They irrigated their rich farmland; wrote about how to successfully raise crops; loaned money for profit; had a detailed system of law; enjoyed books from the library; and exported and imported products. Their mathematicians developed the concepts of square and cube roots. So, all of this may be interesting but what does it mean?

In many ways Abram’s life and concerns were the same as ours. His obedience to God’s call was no simpler for him because he lived four thousand years ago. His life was as full of decisions and the “hubbub” of living as our own. He could have returned to the familiar and comfortable life of his homeland when his father died. If he had, however, Abram would have missed the greatest adventure of his life. Why did he choose to go to an unknown place, guided by a new God? Why do we follow God each day, trusting Him to guide us in the right direction?

Hebrews 11, in the New Testament, tells us that Abram acted out of faith. His was a faith centered in the promise of the Messiah. How can we have such faith? It isn’t something that we can will to happen, but it is something that we can pray for daily. Ephesians 2 tells us that faith is a gift from God. God gives us a faith in His completed plan of salvation for us. God calls us to live for Him and exercise our faith “muscles.” As He did for Abram, God has given us faith. As He did for Abram, He gives us choices every day by which to exercise His gift.

Learn more about faith in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 12:1-8

1. Skim the genealogy of Abram from Genesis 11:10ff. From which son of Noah was Abram a descendant (vs. 10)? Who was Abram’s father (vs. 26)? Who were Abram’s brothers?
2. What promise (covenant) did God make with Abram? (vs. 2-3)
3. How does vs. 4 demonstrate Abram’s faith? Read the Hebrews 11:8-10 “commentary” on Abram’s action. What other faith actions were part of Abram’s life?
4. How did Abram receive God’s message to him in vs. 7? Would there be other similar appearances to Abram? (Gen. 17:1; Gen. 18:1)
5. How do we see Abram’s worship life in vs. 7b and 8b? What can we learn from Abram’s response?
6. Read today’s New Testament lesson. (Romans 4:1-5, 13-17) What about this patriarch does Paul celebrate? In what sense is Abram our “father” also?

Second Sunday in Lent

Romans 5:1-11

In his writings preceding today's passage, Paul has made it clear that no human work, position, or goodness can affect salvation for anyone. Only God's grace, received by the God-given gift of faith, guarantees our eternity. Paul continues, "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Ever have one of those days? About the time that you have endured all the stress at the job that you can stand for one twenty-four hour period, something else goes wrong. About the time that you wonder if you have to walk out the door of the house, hop in the car and head for somewhere—anywhere—else, one of the kids smacks his sibling and the screaming and denials start. By bedtime, you're so hyper that you still hear the clock ticking at 1 a.m. Have you been there?

We often look at this passage only as to its message about the peace with God that we enjoy because our sins are covered by Christ. We are no longer God's enemies because of the cross. That eternal peace that is declared by God is very real, but so is the peace that comes to us every day because of our faith in Christ. Not only has He removed our guilt, but as He said, "I came that they may have life and have it *abundantly*." (Jn. 10:10)

As impossible as it seems, Paul says that we can "exult in our tribulations." Not that we are happy about them, but that we need not lose our enthusiasm for life because of them. He says that tribulations bring "perseverance." We don't have to give up, because the Holy Spirit is holding us up and giving us strength and peace in the midst of any stress or sadness. And we will grow in the tough days much more than we grow in the easy days. As hard as today may seem, it is a tool by which God can draw us closer to Him, teach us about His strength, and show us His love. He does not cause bad days, nor does He cause sadness, but He can use these things to help us grow up into people of faith who turn to Him in all situations, even the daily frustrations—those days filled with the "little stuff." He wants to be our strength in it all.

Learn more about God's strength and grace in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

Second Sunday in Lent

Romans 5:1-11

1. How does Paul summarize the Lenten message in verses 6-10?
2. Note the sequence of vs. 3-4: suffering, _____, _____, _____. How does God work through the sequence?
3. According to vs. 7, 8, and 10 what is unusual about Christ's action?

For Family Reflection

4. God's Word encourages us to "rejoice in our sufferings" (vs. 3). Talk about a time when you (or your family) suffered and God brought about joy through that suffering.
5. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (vs. 8). Reflect upon and confess a recent and remembered sin. Talk about what it means for you that Jesus died for that sin.
6. Read (and perhaps sing) the hymn: "Jesus Sinners Will Receive." (TLH #324, LW#229)

Second Sunday in Lent

Philippians 3:17-4:1

In contemplating the cross during Lent, we are unavoidably brought to a consciousness of our own unworthiness. We are moved to pray that God will grant us a humble heart. Do we really understand what we are seeking?

Today we read Paul's strong encouragement to his flock to follow his example in living out their faith. We may feel a little uncomfortable at what seems to be a very prideful claim by Paul that other Christians should be like himself. He seems to lack humility in his words, but is that a fair judgment? Do we really understand Christian humility?

I have a Christian friend living "down South" who has only one really irritating habit—he always, and at length, cites his own unworthiness as he begins any contribution to a meeting or conversation. One wants to say, "So, get on with your point already!" In other words, he is very proud of his humility. It is probably true that as soon as you think you are humble, you aren't.

Our culture reacts negatively to the term "humble." The word rouses thoughts of a weak, whiney person; one who is either totally naïve or one who will cower when danger is near. Even Christians seem to think that humble means to continually berate oneself for being unworthy or to be silent while more able persons speak or act. Humility, to God, means something different.

Paul did not think of himself as either humble or prideful. He didn't think about it. He just lived his life as closely to God's direction as he could. If that meant honestly using himself as an example—whether as good or as sinful—he did it without hesitation.

Christian humility is not in what we say or do. It is the result of recognizing, as Paul did, Who is the Master of our lives. Paul served only one Master, and he boldly tackled any task given him by his Lord. His humility was not something that he pursued or exhibited, but an understanding of his position in God's eyes. That is Christian humility—living for Christ, not ourselves. Acknowledging Christ as our only Master replaces the old master, the self, and is the beginning of humility. That is the humble heart for which we pray in this season of Lent.

Learn more about humility in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Second Sunday in Lent

Philippians 3:17-4:1

1. Was Paul being prideful or self-glorifying in setting himself forth as an example? Read some previous verses (Philippians 3:7-10) to see Who Paul's example was.
2. Would Paul's observation about the world of his day (vs. 18-19) be true of our day? What are your observations of our world?
3. We are a citizen of a community, a state, a country and _____ (vs. 20). How are we a citizen there already? When will our citizenship be confirmed?

For Family Reflection

4. In what ways (and when) does your mind turn to "earthly things" (vs. 19)? How do we refocus our mind on heavenly things?
5. What are some ways we put a lot of time, money, and worry into our "lowly bodies" (vs. 20)? Is it important to take care of our earthly/lowly body? Which body is more important? What will our glorious body be like?
6. Paul proposed himself as an example (vs. 17). Who are some examples of faith and Godly living for you (fellow church members, family members, etc.)? For whom can you be an example?

Second Sunday in Lent

John 3:1-17

The Pharisee, Nicodemus, “came to Jesus by night....” Nicodemus was defying his peers in visiting Jesus, especially with his most serious interest and his most serious questions. Jesus recognized his sincerity and reasoned with the Pharisee as they met in the cool of the evening.

This event in Jesus’ life is one reason that many Christians describe themselves as “born again.” Jesus told Nicodemus that he must have a renewed inner life, a spiritual life. He had to be reformed and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. His salvation would be worked by God and his whole being would begin a new existence. We are all “born again” when faith enters our lives, whether as infants at the baptismal font, or as adults when the Holy Spirit first works faith in our hearts.

What we have is unbelievably precious. Jesus compared Himself to the bronze serpent raised by Moses in the wilderness. He was not comparing His being to the serpent, but His work on the cross with the work of God in the wilderness. Back then, God’s people had rebelled, yet again, against Him. They had again rejected Him as Lord. In response God sent a great plague of poisonous snakes that killed many Israelites, but because of His love God instructed Moses to lift up a bronze serpent in the midst of the plague. Anyone who would in faith and repentance look upon the elevated serpent was saved from the snakes (Numbers 21:6ff). What an intense description of what Christ has done for us! We are born in the midst of rebellion and in the hopelessness of a life filled with the deadly poison of sin. It is by believing in Christ, lifted up on the cross, being punished in our place, that we gain life. And as Ephesians puts it, “and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

What of Nicodemus? Did he believe? Did the Holy Spirit work faith in his heart? The Bible tells us that he again defied his peers by coming to the burial of Jesus, bringing with him the spices to be used in the entombment.

Learn more about faith in a Bible study this week.

A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee

Second Sunday in Lent

John 3:1-17

1. Who was Nicodemus? Why would he come to Jesus at night? What questions did he have? (Note: We find Nicodemus with Jesus again in John 19:39.)
2. Jesus says “You must be born again” (vs. 7). What does it mean to be “born again?” Why wasn’t Nicodemus’ physical birth enough?
3. What Old Testament incident (vs. 14) becomes part of Jesus’ explanation of salvation? (see Numbers 21) What was prophetic about Moses’ action in the wilderness?

For Family Reflection

4. John 3:16 is sometimes called “the Gospel in a nutshell.” Why is it a simple summary of salvation? Say the verse together as a family. Memorize the passage.
5. When were you “born again?” Why was it necessary for you to be born again? What blessings did you receive in your re-birth?
6. What’s the good news for you in John 3:17? Who else is this good news for? Who are you going to tell this week?

Second Sunday in Lent

Mark 8:27-38

Of all of the people whom Satan might have used to try to dissuade Jesus from His ministry, who would have ever thought it would be Peter? He was at times brash, but he was also the disciple who answered Jesus' question of, "Who do you say that I am?" with "You are the Christ". Yet, when Jesus was arrested, Peter again failed to be true to Him, adamantly proclaiming, "I do not know Him!" And again we see Peter in his post-Resurrection ministry proclaiming the Gospel at the cost of his own life.

Perhaps Martin Luther's experience can help us understand this confusing picture. Luther once said that he feared his own heart more than he feared the pope and all his followers (even though he was in danger of being burned at the stake as a heretic to the Catholic Church). There is a desire in each Christian to follow Jesus with heart and mind. Yet, Luther's desire to serve Christ was still at times overtaken by that enemy that we all live with, our selfish and sinful nature. As Jesus said to Peter, "...you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Lent is a good time to seriously contemplate Jesus' words, "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" (vs. 35). Learning to lose our concern over our selves, and direct our total attention to Jesus, is part of growing up as Christians. Looking at men like Peter and Luther brings the realization that learning to lose our selves in order to follow Jesus is a journey that will not be completed in this life. Yet, God continually calls us and enables us to better imitate our Lord. As we seek His will each day, He forgives us our failures, shares our successes, and shows us new and exciting paths to follow.

We learn to know Jesus through God's Word. Do you make time for it?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Second Sunday in Lent

Mark 8:27-38

1. The text shares Peter's faith. What did Peter confess about Jesus? What was the source of Peter's faith?
2. The text also shares Peter's limited knowledge about Jesus. How did Peter limit Jesus' mission? How did Jesus respond to his ignorance?
3. What does it mean to lose one's life for following Jesus (vs. 35)? What are you willing to give up for Jesus?

For Family Reflection

4. Have you ever been ashamed of Jesus or of following Him? Does our rejection of Jesus leave us forever rejected by Him?
5. If Jesus were to ask you "Who do you say I am?" what would you say?
6. Why is this a good Lenten season text? (Hint: see vs. 31) How is your family (and your church family) observing the Lenten season?

Second Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:31-35

Rather than a sincere warning to Jesus, the Pharisees' words were more likely meant to get Him out of the area. His presence was causing all sorts of turmoil among the people, and the Pharisees were ready to be rid of Him and get things back to normal.

The world today would do the same. When Christians live out their lives in the will of Christ, the norm of behavior and expectations gets turned upside down. Women who are pregnant and afraid find out that there are people who love them enough to provide needed medical care and counseling, as well as financial help. They learn that abortion is not their only option. Alcoholics discover that there are friends who will help them in bad times. Homeless people discover that Christians are there to help them get back into the mainstream of society. Most of all, through visitations, home Bible studies, support groups, midweek youth groups, etc., the hopeless discover that Jesus Christ has paid for their sin and grants them eternal and abundant life as His children.

The world invited Jesus to leave because He caused too much turmoil--the turmoil of love. The world invites Christians to leave for the same reason. Christians demonstrating that God is the Master and the answer to the world's sickness is more than Satan can bear. They draw too many people away from his power and into God's kingdom.

Jesus boldly answered the challenge to leave. He proclaimed God's love in the face of rejection. He won the battle. His love was fully and finally demonstrated on the cross.

Now, we face the invitation to stay out of the world's business. The invitation gets more and more serious every year. Christians are condemned and ridiculed. Christianity is criticized for being less loving than most of the religions of the world. How will we respond?

Will we back out of the fray and insulate ourselves in our churches? Many German Lutherans in the 1940s pulled back into the safety of the church and ended up seeing the crosses removed from their churches and replaced with the swastika. What will we do? Will we be silent or will we do in our world what Christ would do?

Invite a friend to Bible study!

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Second Sunday in Lent

Luke 13:31-35

1. Who was the "fox" (vs. 32)? Was Jesus frightened by the threats?
2. What is significant about Jesus' prophecy "the third day I finish my course?" (vs. 32) Even though we are in a long Lenten season, what events await us?
3. Why was Jesus grieving over Jerusalem? What had happened in Jerusalem in its past? Using a study Bible or other reference find out what happened to Jerusalem in subsequent years.

For Family Reflection

4. What is comforting about the picture of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings (vs. 34)?
5. Read Psalm 118:26. Where do we find this verse in the Gospel reading? What blessings come in the name of the Lord?
6. What circumstances in our family, our church, or our community might make Jesus sad today? Where do we find hope and joy in our situation?