

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18

Luke 13:31-35

Philippians 3:17-4:1

“Woke up this morning with my mind,
set on Jesus.” (3X Sing)

“I will praise, I will praise, I will praise you.”

That song was brought to us at
the racial justice retreat.

Will you sing it with me?

Amen!

It is a song that has continued to
ring in my heart in the waking up times and
in the going through the day time.

A spiritual melody that is like a prayer
and a source of strength.

It's a good time to have such
melodies and words on hand.

We will sing a good one during
our anthem today, too.

Melodies and words on hand,
to keep us rooted in the teachings of Christ.

Today, I will be talking a bit about each of
our lessons from the Bible.

We will find how each one ties us together
and also supports us during these times of
rising tensions and instability.

Tensions of aggressive war and
instability in our government leaders.

To glimpse, perhaps, how that in
even the darkest times, we can proclaim
“The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom then shall I fear?”

Words from our psalm.

And in this walk through the texts,
we might be pulled together to find that
the naming of our fears,

in the safe space of St. Stephen,
takes away their power and
builds up our hope. (Pause)

Abram in Genesis is troubled.

In his mind, he understood that
the time had passed for God to come

through on God's side of the promise.

Abram was afraid that God waited too long.

So, the Lord then came in a vision
with the familiar, "Do not be afraid."

It is code language from God telling him (and us)
that there is some good news coming.

God knows that for us to hear what God has to say,
to hear the gospel,
we must not be afraid.

What was Abram's fear, was it just that
he'd not have offspring?

It was that his slave, Eliezer of Damascus,
would become his heir.

Even in the Bible there are
examples of discrimination.

As if slaves could not be worthy enough
to receive an inheritance.

Perhaps they are more worthy than anyone?

Anyway, God played along with Abram and

promised that “this man will not be your heir;
no one but your very own issue shall
be your heir.”

That’s a little odd, don’t you think?

God didn’t say, “Your son or daughter
will be your heir.”

God said, “No one but your very own issue
shall be your heir.”

Is his “issue” the understanding that Abram
was troubled, untrusting, and biased?

That these will be the issues passed down?

Maybe, but the irony is not lost on us.

Abram’s so worried that his
heir might be a slave, when the truth is...
they were because
the Israelites were slaves.

In Egypt, for more than just
one generation,
they were slaves.

Until they cried out and God heard them.

Abram named his fear in a dark time and
God made a covenant with him. (Pause)

Psalm 27 is next.

Keep this psalm close.

The Psalmist proclaims words as
the writer goes through a dark
period of their own.

Experiencing the greatest fear we find
the writer naming them and giving us a strategy
to help us in our fears.

“Evil doers close in, war rises up against me,
days of trouble, the enemy surrounds people,
even father and mother forsake
(turn their backs) on the writer.

With every fear named...
there is a response of hope.

“The Lord, the stronghold makes
us bold and unshaken.

God gives shelter, hiding places in the sanctuary
and raises us up on a rock.

Even in the midst of struggle,
I will sing and make music to the Lord.”

“Woke up this morning
with my mind,
set on Jesus.”

Good people of St. Stephen, keep Psalm 27 close.

Then there’s Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

Here Paul seems to be boasting a bit.

“Join in imitating me,” he wrote.

To us, it may sound a little conceited.

I’d be rather skeptical of a preacher encouraging
the congregation to be like they are.

But when taken into context, this was
a common practice of orators, teachers,
and leaders to conduct themselves
in exemplary ways.

Imagine that!

Leaders conducting themselves

in exemplary ways.

There indeed are some that do!

We count on them to be role models and
to show us the correct way to do something
and Paul had a track record of excellence
and effectiveness.

To such the point that he was imprisoned
for his work in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus.

So we can understand him as not bragging
but saying a truth.

Like he was saying, “Imitate me,
because I am imitating Jesus.”

Set your mind on Jesus.

That’s who we want to be like.
Be like Jesus.

When we take that step, and then another,
and another... in the direction of being
like Jesus, we begin to come...
to see what we want out of life.

One needs to know what it is they

want out of life because there are forces in
the world that distract, disturb, and
make us fearful.

There is a persistent ploy to bring our attentions
away from God and back to money,
possessions, power, popularity, and if we
just vote for this one or that one -
it can all be yours.

And equally disturbing is the persistent ploy
to bring our attentions to threats, dangers,
disasters, and all the scary things that IF

we just vote for this one or that one -
they will all disappear,
but they won't...
they don't have that power.

Now, it is not that I am saying, "Don't vote."

Please vote, it matters.

What I am saying is that there are distractions
that draw us away from
"standing firm in the Lord."

Distractions that lead us away from naming
the fear and finding hope.

Persistent voices that make promises
that cannot be kept.

But Paul writes, to say that
“we are unfolding expressions, embodiments,
of the extent to which Christ is at work
within us.

And Christ works most powerfully within us
when we understand that our bodies belong
to both us and God.”

Discerning Christ, in what you want out of life,
is the best way to get the most out of our lives.

It is the only way, in my opinion,
to be incorruptible.

“Set on Jesus.” (Pause)

In conclusion, in our short gospel lesson today,
we find out what Jesus has his mind set on.

Since chapter 9, it is set on Jerusalem.

And he is not going to be deterred by fear.

Even with Herod Antipas’ threat of death,

Jesus came right at him and the Pharisees.

“Deliver this message to Herod,” Jesus said.

“I have more work to do and will not deter from it,
it is necessary that I do these things.”

Necessary things like teach and heal, but
also necessary for him to go to Jerusalem.

He will fulfill his purpose but not before
he weeps over the city.

He will fulfill his purpose but not before
he communicates desire to gather
his people under his wing.

Now, we must be careful here, to not
understand this to mean the entire
Jewish population did not desire to be
under Jesus' wing nor
see God at work through him.

Many did follow Jesus but even though
Jesus desired them all, there were others
who desired other things.

And that means something for us
because we desire “other” things.

We also must watch our desires so
that we are not left to our own devices.

For then we wake up with our minds
set on other things.

But, let's not miss the gospel message...
mothering hens don't give up and
they are fierce protectors of their brood.

They will stop at nothing to protect and shelter.

Even the ones that wander...

May we set our minds on being gathered
by Jesus during these, and every, day.

There is good news coming... "Do not be afraid."

AMEN!