

In this passage Paul describes Abraham as an individual who through faith found a right relationship with God. He is the father of all who trust in the Lord. Paul uses the example of Abraham as a centerpiece for his argument that righteousness with God comes through faith and not by works of the law. The promise given to Abraham and his descendants was not made because of good works or legal obedience. It rests on grace alone.

Listen now as I read from Paul's letter to the Romans.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about - but not before God. What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

John 3:1-17

In our gospel story Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees, comes during the night to talk with Jesus. Nicodemus is a figure used by the evangelist to represent a type of person who wants to believe but has difficulty understanding spiritual realities. Jesus tells him that individuals cannot enter the kingdom of God unless they are born anew through water and the Spirit. The inner meaning of the passage partly turns on the fact that "born anew" can also be understood as "born from on high" and the same Greek word means both wind and spirit. Jesus then tells

Nicodemus of the Son of Man come down from heaven who will be lifted up, both on the cross to die to the world and to return to heaven in glory.

Hear now these words from the gospel of John.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven - the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Liturgist: This is the gospel message of our Lord and Savior.

**All: May the reading and the hearing of Your word inform our minds, comfort our souls, and guide our feet.**