

The Lessons for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost / June 7th

Illumination

Our liturgical colors are green again: The six-month-long stretch of Sundays after Pentecost will continue until Advent begins in November. Churches may follow either of two Lectionary tracks, each following a different set of First Readings and Psalms. In Track One, the first readings will follow the Hebrew Bible's story of God's chosen people, from the patriarch Abraham to Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Joshua. In Sunday's Track One first reading, we meet Abram, whom God will later rename Abraham. Even at the advanced age of 75, Abram's faith empowers him to follow God's challenging call to uproot his family and begin a long journey from his home in Ur (in present-day Iraq) toward the promised land. In return, God will bless Abram and his family, and through them, all the families of the Earth.

The First Lesson is from Genesis

(12:1-9)

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the

oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Illumination:

Echoing God's righteous anger against the people as prophesied by Hosea in the Track Two first reading, the portion of Psalm 50 that we read this Sunday warns that God has high expectations of the chosen people and will not hesitate to punish those who stray from the right path. The Psalmist imagines these fearful words: "O Israel, I will bear witness against you, for I am God your God." How can the people do God's will? Don't sacrifice bulls and goats, the Psalmist advises worshipers at the ancient temple. Rather, offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and make good your vows to the Most High.

Psalm 50

⁷ Hear, O my people, and I will speak:

"O Israel, I will bear witness against you; *
for I am God, your God.

⁸ I do not accuse you because of your sacrifices; *
your offerings are always before me.

⁹ I will take no bull-calf from your stalls, *
nor he-goats out of your pens;

¹⁰ For all the beasts of the forest are mine, *
the herds in their thousands upon the hills.

- ¹¹ I know every bird in the sky, *
and the creatures of the fields are in my sight.
- ¹² If I were hungry, I would not tell you, *
for the whole world is mine and all that is in it.
- ¹³ Do you think I eat the flesh of bulls, *
or drink the blood of goats?
- ¹⁴ Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving *
and make good your vows to the Most High.
- ¹⁵ Call upon me in the day of trouble; *
I will deliver you, and you shall honor me."

Illumination:

As we begin this long season, we'll take a deep dive into Paul's Letter to the Romans that will continue into September. In this, his final letter, Paul was reaching out pastorally to a Christian community that he had not yet met. He hoped to reconcile tensions within a faith community that included both Jewish and Gentile Christians. At the time, Rome's Jewish Christians had been exiled for several years and were just returning to a Gentile community that had gotten used to worshipping and administering the church community without them. Paul reminds them all that Abraham's descendants received God's promise under the law, while Gentiles who become Christians now receive it through their new faith. We are all children of Abraham and Sarah now, Paul assures them, through faith in Jesus's death and resurrection.

A reading from Romans (9:9-13, 19-26)

The promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Illumination: Having spent much of Lent and Eastertide hearing selections from John’s Gospel, we now return to Matthew for the remainder of the Lectionary year. Sunday’s Gospel tells of the calling of Matthew. Jesus had a bad reputation for hanging out with sinners, outcasts, and people the authorities considered suspicious: Prostitutes, drunks, and lepers; women, foreigners, and maybe worst of all, tax collectors, those despised collaborators who extracted the Roman Empire’s taxes from their neighbors. People like Matthew, who despite his outcast status as a tax collector hurried to follow Jesus ... and invited him home for dinner. Then we hear Matthew’s account of Jesus

healing a woman with a hemorrhage on his way to bringing a dead girl back to life. Both of these women would have been considered unclean under ritual law, but Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician."

The Gospel according to Matthew (9:9-13, 18-26)

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me."

And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the

crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.