

Materials for Virtual Worship - Sunday, 28 February 2021
The Second Sunday of Lent

**Please use this material with the order of Virtual Service
for the Linton Team of Churches in Lent**

Collects

Almighty God,
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all those who are admitted
 into the fellowship of Christ's religion,
that they may reject those things
 that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Or

Almighty God,
by the prayer and discipline of Lent
may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings,
and by following in his Way
come to share in his glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Readings

Galatians 3: 1-9

Law or Faith

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. Well

Materials for Virtual Worship - Sunday, 28 February 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent

then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

Just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness', so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.' For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

Mark 8:31-end

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

Materials for Virtual Worship - Sunday, 28 February 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent

Reflection

How Paul understood the Bible

Paul had been brought up as a pious Jew, he had trained as a Pharisee in what we might now call rabbinic method and, until his conversion, he was 'zealous for the Law' – meaning the Torah, the Hebrew Bible. All that changed after his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, when he embraced Jesus as his lord and used his considerable theological skills to preach the good news to non-Jews (Gentiles) as well as Jews in Asia Minor. But just how much did he really change? Throughout his life Paul regarded himself as a Jew, but a Jew who found in Christ the fulfilment of God's covenantal promise as revealed in the Hebrew Bible.

We can't know exactly how Paul used the Bible in his public preaching, but we do have his letters where he addressed specific issues and set out his pioneering theology. What we immediately notice is that although his letters are not peppered with *quotations* from the Bible, there are biblical *ideas* everywhere. As a Jewish scholar Paul had two major tasks to resolve: firstly, to show how the Bible allowed non-Jews to be included in God's covenant; secondly, that Jesus' life, death and resurrection had transformed the world for ever.

The way Paul tackled these two tasks was by using two characters from the Bible: Abraham and Adam.

Let's look at Abraham first. Here's the situation: Paul has been preaching the good news of the risen Christ to the people of Galatia but since he last visited them, they have been told by a group of conservative Jewish missionary converts to Christianity that in order to be full members of the church they needed to conform to the Torah or Law and that meant being circumcised. In his response Paul had to tread very carefully - he couldn't reject the Torah because it was revealed to Moses by God, but on the other hand it clearly made no sense to insist that non-Jews keep to Jewish laws. We sense his

Materials for Virtual Worship - Sunday, 28 February 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent

frustration, as he says to them in his letter to the Galatians, 'You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?' (Galatians 3:1).

Paul's justification is presented in a careful dissection of the Abraham story. Paul uses a rabbinic method of argument which strings together a series of Bible proof texts, which literally prove his point. The chief Bible proof texts he uses are from Genesis. Paul's argument in Galatians 3 is far from easy but it goes something like this: God made a covenant promise with Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation (Genesis 15:5) for *all* people (Genesis 18:18) - Gentiles and Jews. God made this covenant with Abraham long before he gave the Torah to Moses, so salvation does not depend on keeping to the Law but on having faith; Abraham had faith in God which God judged was sufficient to be treated as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

And as for the ritual of circumcision which God commanded Abraham (Genesis 17:11) as a sign of the covenant, this is now optional, because Christ is the sign which replaces it. So, Paul concludes: 'For [in Christ Jesus] neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything' (Galatians 6:15).

So, what Paul has done is to give the Galatian Christians a ready-made response to the Jewish-Christian missionaries to prove biblically that obedience to the Law is not an entrance requirement into the Church and salvation.

Paul's treatment of the Bible raises several significant issues for us. Christians today sometimes use the proof-text method, but what are dangers of using the Bible in this way? The story of Abraham also makes us consider who are the insiders and who we treat as outsiders: what makes someone a Christian - do we continue to set up false 'entrance' requirements in terms of gender, sexuality, class, race and so on?

Paul's use of the figure of Adam to solve another theological issue is perhaps one of the most original aspects of his theology. Whereas Abraham is often mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, after Adam is

Materials for Virtual Worship - Sunday, 28 February 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent

introduced in Genesis 1-5 the Hebrew Bible remains almost silent about him, but for Paul the figure of Adam explains why it was necessary for God to send Jesus Christ to the world, to be crucified and then resurrected.

This time Paul does not use proof texts to present his ideas but another method - analogy. In his Letter to the Romans he says:

Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. (Romans 5:14)

How can Adam be the type or analogy of the one to come? The answer is that although Adam sinned and Christ did not, both had a fundamental effect on the world and human existence. As Paul says a few verses earlier, 'Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man ... so death spread to all because all have sinned' (Romans 5:12). The Fall of Adam brought death and sin into the world, the resurrection of Christ, the 'last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45), brought life and grace. It is from his 'two Adam' analogy that Paul has created the idea of original or first sin – an idea very different from his rabbi colleagues who preferred to see in Adam 'original perfection' subsequently marred by sin.

So, what do you think of Paul's idea of original sin? Are we to take it literally or should we see it metaphorically? Is original perfection preferable?

Paul sometimes gets a bad press today and he is accused of inventing a Christianity very different from Jesus' message in the Gospels. I leave it to you to decide whether that is so, but without Paul we would not have a *framework* of thought rich in biblical language and ideas which presents Christ as the one who liberates us from sin and offers us the Easter gospel of hope.

Michael Wilcockson

Materials for Virtual Worship - Sunday, 28 February 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent

The God of Abraham praise

1 The God of Abraham praise,
who reigns enthroned above,
Ancient of Everlasting Days,
and God of Love;
Jehovah, great I AM,
by earth and heaven confest;
we bow and bless the sacred name
for ever blest.

2 The God who reigns on high
the great archangels sing,
and "Holy, holy, holy!" cry
"Almighty King,
Who was, and is the same,
and evermore shall be.
Jehovah, Father, great I AM
we worship thee."

3 Before the Saviour's face
the ransomed nations bow,
o'erwhelmed at his almighty grace
for ever new;
he shows his prints of love –
they kindle to a flame,
and sound through all the worlds above
the slaughtered Lamb.

4 The whole triumphant host
give thanks to God on high;
"hail, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"
they ever cry:
hail, Abraham's God, and mine;
(I join the heavenly lays)
all might and majesty are thine,
and endless praise.

Materials for Virtual Worship - Sunday, 28 February 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent

Be thou my vision

1 Be thou my vision,
O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me
save that thou art;
be thou my best thought
in the day and the night,
both waking or sleeping,
thy presence my light.

2 Be thou my wisdom,
be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me
and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father,
and I thy true son;
be thou in me dwelling,
and I with thee one.

3 Be thou my breastplate,
my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour,
be thou my true might:
be thou my soul's shelter,
be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward,
great Power of my power.

4 Riches I need not,
nor man's empty praise;
be thou mine inheritance
now and always;
be thou, and thou only,
the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of heaven,
my treasure thou art.

Materials for Virtual Worship - Sunday, 28 February 2021

The Second Sunday of Lent

5 High King of heaven
thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys,
after victory is won;
great Heart of my own heart,
whatever befall,
still be thou my vision,
O Ruler of all.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God,
you see that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves:
keep us both outwardly in our bodies,
and inwardly in our souls;
that we may be defended from all adversities
 which may happen to the body,
and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.