

February 25, 2018

2 Lent

Rev Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 God enters into covenant with Abraham; devotion to God for being a father to nations and kings. A call to Radical Faith

Romans 4:13-25 Our covenant is for devotion to God, being reckoned as righteous.

Mark 8:31-38 Jesus said that his followers must take up their own cross.

Lent is the season for reflection on our faith; on who is the God of our faith; what our God has taught us through his Son Jesus Christ; and what reprioritizing is needed in our life so that we can experience the fullness of God in our life.

I have a friend named Tom. He was raised in the business of golf, and became a PGA golf instructor. One of his job duties was to run the pro shop at the country club where he worked. They have had a yearly sale of merchandise in that shop for many years. Five or six years ago the management made the politically correct decision to rename the sale from a Christmas Sale to a Holiday Sale, so that no one would be offended. Tom is a devout Christian, and he was offended by the new name.

The next year the GM asked Tom if he was ready for the Holiday Sale. He told him, 'No, we aren't going to have one this year.' The GM asked why not. Tom said, 'Because we are going to have a Christmas Sale. That's what it is; everybody knows that's what it is; and I can't call it a Holiday Sale. If you want to have a Holiday Sale, someone else will have to do it.'

Tom came to me and told me how nervous he was. He didn't know if it was going to cost him his job. But he knew that he had to take a stand. He knew it was worth any cost it might have.

The next week, the GM saw Tom and asked, 'So are you ready for the Christmas Sale?' It was a very successful sale that year.

The impetuous disciple Peter rebuked Jesus for his pronouncement that he – the Messiah – would suffer, be rejected by the elders, and killed. What an outlandish thought – the Anointed One, sent from God to rescue Israel – executed?

Jesus' words in response are unforgettable.

Get behind me Satan.

You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.

He told everyone to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him.

Jesus calls humankind to a higher standard of thought and conduct. His rebuke to Peter was forcing Peter to think about what God wants out of

Jesus' ministry, and not just what Peter wants – or the disciples want – or what Israel wants out of his time on earth. You and I are called to deny ourselves – not to think less of ourselves, but to think of ourselves less – to make something greater than ourselves the object of our life and our actions. That something we are to make the greater importance is God's will.

Abraham knew that God's will would always come first. And so he left his home country, his people, and his father's household to find the new home that God planned for him to settle into.

Abraham trusted – even at age 99 – that God would fulfill His promise to give him a male son, and many descendants.

Abraham trusted God's will when he submitted to God's command to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.

Abraham always put God's plan ahead of any personal plan, and trusted God's will.

On February 14, ten days ago, a gunman ran into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and started shooting high school students. The school's Assistant Football Coach, Aaron Feis, threw himself in front of students to shield them from the gunman. He saved lives, and he and sixteen others were killed. A spokesperson for the football program said, "He died the same way he lived – he put himself second."

God made a covenant with humankind by giving us his Son. Jesus bore that cross because he knew that was God's will. God's motive for giving up his own son was God's unbound love for us. Jesus' motive for accepting that unbelievably difficult choice, was his unbound love for you and for God.

The pocket coin I gave you at the start of Lent says on it, "Behold the Lamb of God." He was sacrificed for you, like a sacrificial lamb on the temple altar. He wants to be first in your life. What cross – what earthly burdens – do you face? Jesus says that you do not have to find a way around those burdens, or try to manage them on your own. You can take up those burdens, and follow Jesus' example for life that is lived for God's will. Jesus has promised to make the burden light. He has promised to be with us always. "Take my yoke upon you... my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us they peace.