

2 Lent

March 17, 2019

Rev Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalms 278

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

Abram's faith is reckoned to him as righteousness.

I Lord hear my prayer, when I call answer me.

Our citizenship is in heaven.

How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen
gathers her brood under her wings.

I grew up in what I always thought of as a huge family. I am one of four children. My parents loved to travel. We would hook up our travel trailer in the Fall and head for Maine, or Vermont, or the Adirondack Mountains in northern NY; or in the winter we'd head for Florida, living out of our travel trailer until the below-zero weather in northern NY started to warm up.

I remember our group of six huddled together when we walked the streets of Washington, D.C., or St. Augustine, Florida. There is part of me that feels uncomfortable in a strange place, surrounded by strangers. But there was a more powerful sense of comfort when I was close to my parents and brothers and sister. That picture of comfort and protection is the image written on my mind as I hear Jesus wanting to gather together the children of Jerusalem.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

Jerusalem was first settled about 3,000 BC. At that time it covered 15 acres, and had a population of 2,000. During Jesus lifetime, it covered 230 acres with a population of 40,000. So this 'city' wasn't much of a city by today's standards. But it was located at the crossroads of trade routes from Egypt, the East, and Asia Minor; and it hosted a constant stream of visitors.

Regardless of size, Jerusalem was THE City of God for Israel, and it was the symbol of their nation. It was Israel's largest city, and it was their spiritual and political capital; Jews from around the world visited it often. But Jerusalem also had a history of rejecting God's prophets;

Naboth was stoned to death: 1 Kgs 21:8-14

Zechariah was stoned to death. 2 Chr 24:20-22

Jesus was crucified.

Stephen was stoned to death. Acts 7:52, 58

When Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans in 65AD, there would never again be anything like the Jerusalem Temple. BUT, now, through the Holy Spirit – whom we receive at Baptism - that holy presence of God-with-us is still available. That place where heaven and earth touch, that place of the

Holy of Holies, that place where God resides on earth, now lies within us, if we are open to it. And Jesus wants to gather us in, just like a hen gathers her brood under her wing.

God saw the faith of Abram, and ‘reckoned it to him as righteousness’. Abram walked the path of faith in God, even when he questioned where the path was going. And God blessed him for that faith. Even when we can’t see where our path is headed, can we keep walking the path of faith? We weren’t meant to figure this out alone. We have a faith community to gather with.

Paul warned the church in Philippi not to be seduced by earthly things, like those whose ‘god is the belly’. Paul reminds them that as Christians their citizenship is in heaven. By remembering what nation we really belong to, Paul encourages us to stand firm in our faith.

For those with faith, we are gathered together under Jesus’ mothering wing. That nurturing love explains the sense of sacred relationship that I feel in our faith family – much like the nurturing love of my parents and siblings in my earthly family as a boy.

The words of Paul today add to our understanding of what ‘faith community’ is - gathered together for support against earthly things that lure us away from our real citizenship.

On Friday I was asked by a preschool mom if her son could be baptized here. And I said, ‘Absolutely!’ The preschool has at least one cross in each room. The children say the Lord’s prayer every morning. They attend chapel every Wednesday and Thursday. They see me pretty regularly, at least most of the time wearing a collar. It is very clear that the families of our preschool see themselves as part of our faith community. Something very, very important is being provided here. Remember that this is YOUR preschool. Remember that our true citizenship is in heaven. Our 8 am family, 10 am family, and preschool family are all gathered together under the wing of God the Son. Remember what God has blessed us to accomplish here; and stand firm in Christ.

May this season of Lent bring new focus to our relationship with each other in this expanding faith community, and in the Body of Christ. Amen.