**“Baptized Into the Active Love of God”**

Genesis 12:1-9

Romans 4:1-8, 13-17

John 3:1-17

Lent 2

Psalm 105 (our Introit) says “God **remembers** His covenant forever, the **Word that He commanded**, for a thousand generations.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

I’m still floored by a Genesis account: the conclusion of the great flood, and God’s **promise** to never again destroy the earth and almost all people and animals that way again. He set a bow in the heavens, He’d said, to **remind Him** (when in His anger over our sinfulness, disobedience, and unbelief / rebellion) so that **when He looks at it up there in the sky**, **He will remember His promise / His covenant, and relent of His anger**. “For a thousand generations” (which He defined as “forever”), God promised **memory of His “covenant”**, to “**remember**” **according to the Words that He Himself “commanded” in “promise”**.

Now (in the same way), He demands **our remembering**. In the 4th of the verses of our Introit reading (on the other side of the insert of readings that we spoke half verse by half verse a bit ago), we’re to “**remember, also**, the wondrous works that **God has done, His miracles, and the judgments He uttered**.” And He made that **memory demand** to people who He called the “offspring of Abraham, His servant” … of “children of Jacob, God’s (His own) chosen ones”.

I would not want to be off that list … but, then, on it, I’d like to figure out really good ways to, myself, remember like His rainbow idea. “Offspring of Abraham, God’s servant”, the “children of Jacob, God’s chosen ones” that’s a blessed group (as all of our readings from Holy Scripture remind us). In Romans 4, we’ve got there “**Blessed are’s**” (a couple of them) as “**gifts**” **gained** in some **connected / “covenanted” and “promised”** **way** by “**faith**” by “**baptism of water and Spirit**” and by **believing like Abraham did** (**trust remembered**, active and energized, **reminded us** by the hearing of those “covenant vows and commands” regularly, **looking believingly upon the sights of what’s “lifted up”** as Jesus speaks of it, sunk-in-to-us as a **heavenly thing** blessed far beyond earthly things.

Abram and Nicodemus were 2 very **regular guys**, yet **changed** and **committed to duty after that change by God’s Words and promises**, faithful and remembering **themselves** (from then on), in faith and close to it so as to **never forget**, and **do** **according to that remembering**, submitting themselves to remembering constantly and in worshipful ways.

**Text**

Abram was, when the Lord **formally addressed him**, of the ripe **young** (yet **seasoned**) age of 75. All of that time he’d lived doing the **(for the most part)** **best that he could** (what he thought was right, by an ethical code, but also giving homage to any godlike notions that he could identify. For him, that meant an abundance of good-luck charms that, he thought, existed to be honored and appeased beneath the charge of one main one who he didn’t know. He “**acquired**” so that he could take care of his own. That was his **religion**; it was the only **one that he knew of**. And he was **good** at acquiring things, but it became his **main** **religion** (a religion of only duty and not **at all** of gracious promise). He’d never known (or hadn’t really adopted) a hope and confidence (a trust) based on **divine promise**.

Until **God made him that promise**. “You, **Abram**, I will bless the earth from. You will be (from now on) useful through your faith, obedience, and lineage. Your **descendents** (and One in particular from who you’ll yet give birth to), will come, both, the **Savior** anda **covenanted people** **because of that saving**. Abram, the Christ will come from you … and His followers … and, from that, a land ultimately called Heaven will be yours, and that simply by My gift divinely promised and believed-in and trusted”.

Nicodemus, not as set in his way by age maybe as Abram but certainly set in his ways by education and the position he’d acquired-to, he too had never faced (or, at least, let sink in) a promise of grace instead of only duty ever-unsatisfactory and frustrating. “What, Jesus, do you have for **me**?” and that question got answered by something that changed (in that late evening) that intelligent man. Nicodemus **followed Jesus from then on**, stayed close, then under the cross to, then, insist that His body to be buried respectfully, hoping that (as Jesus had said) **THAT** **wouldn’t be the end of the story**. For him and any **following and loving the gift of the cross**, **IT WAS JUST THE BEGGINNING**, and a **“re-birth into it by water and the Spirit”** (**Baptism promised to be into what Jesus death and resurrection**), He’d gotten “given by the Father, lifted up, “in the manner-of / that-way-so” “how God loved the world”). Nicodemus got set on a path of security and joy connected to it a Promise, divinely gift / guaranteed that you knew he received and welcomed-for-himself and enjoyed and tightly clung-to.

A **covenant of promise it was** that’s attached not just to **ears** but to the touch of water hearing those Words. In Abram’s case, a **circumcision** of a physical covenanted-promise. “Faith (clinging to that) is counted as righteousness”, and God’s Son “given to the world as sacrifice upon the cross” is gift linked-to and “believed” … and **THAT** is “**eternal life**” … a “**guarantee** **to Abraham’s offspring through a shared faith**” as the book of Romans calls it.

**Application**

And Abram and Nicodemus both **responded to divine promise** faithfully and in documented ways. **Abram** got up from where he was and went to where he sent. He had a long and well-chronicled history of passing on that **covenant Promise from God** to his children and grand-children for their trust. Great-grandchild **Judah** would himself played a critical role in **this Promise being Made Sure**. Jesus’ (his heir according to flesh) would work-it by sacrifice for all trusting in it for themselves.

And **Nicodemus** got written about in the works of other historians of the time as he coupled his **knowledge** to, then, the **person and work of Jesus**. He preached grace and baptismal promise from then on (you knew). He preached the resurrection of Jesus (the Lord) on Easter morning because he was around and likely saw Him as 1 of the 500 who witnessed Him alive after death.

And Pastor Craig reminded me (this week) about the winds of destruction in tornadoes so drastically counter to the “wind of the Holy Spirit” Jesus told Nicodemus about. Hearing the “wind’s **sound**” as our state did, and, now, the “winds” of contagious flue potentially roaming in even our nearby air, a trusting **faith** and **confidence** (a **remembering of God’s promises in Words**) let us move in spite of it **because of the “wind” of the Holy Spirit promised us**.

A **suggestion**, because it’s the same suggestion Jesus made analogy to: John 3:16 gets suggested in force through the Old Testament Children of Israel’s time in the wilderness. There, masses even were **getting sick from an epidemic the grumbling of their sin caused** andscorpion’s **bit and** **infected** and death would often result. Without a vaccine, a **divine** **Remedy** was the only option, but **given** by a **Promise received and believed in**.

As the history accounts it, once bitten, one had to **look and trust** **what God gave**. Death’s **symbol** got lifted high upon a stanchion, and everyone looking and knowing it as God’s Promise raised above the ground on the pole of a cross would not die.

We **have** that **Remedy in its fulfillment**. Just “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever [looks upon Him there and] believes in Him may have eternal life. For God in the manner of a cross **loved the world**, **giving** **His only Son (Him lifted upon a stanchion, embodying the death of every human because of sin), that whoever believes in Him (in our affliction and infection) should not perish but have eternal life**.” God has always wanted this world condemned by our own efforts and injuries (our own sufferings from, for instance, tornadoes and virus) to be **saved for a life to come through Him**.

May **we** (in **our** various **for-this-time-being-only** **wilderness of challenges, afflictions and infections**), look up in faith to the **ETERNAL** **Promise that got delivered-upon** in the cross of Christ … and our **ETERNAL** **Promise by God to us through our baptism into that** … His **covenant to us**. In +Jesus’ name. Amen.