

God’s grace, mercy, and peace be yours this day in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is “A blessing for all nations”, and is based on the Old Testament reading; from Genesis chapter twelve. Let us pray... . Amen.

Today is the second Sunday in Lent. Last week, in Genesis chapter 3, we heard the account of the Fall, of Adam and Eve, their loss of righteousness, and the total corruption of God’s perfect creation. In the beginning God created everything sinless and perfect, but through the action of one man, sin and its consequences entered the world. As a result, “now human nature is passed down (together with the defect and corruption of *Original Sin*) to all people, who are conceived and born in the natural way from father and mother.”(FC SD I 27) As descendants of Adam and Eve, each of us stands guilty of Original Sin and guilty for each and every one of our actual sins since our conception. Last week we also heard God’s promise of a Saviour who would come from the offspring (singular) of the woman, and how this Saviour would defeat and destroy the devil and his power.

In today’s Old Testament reading we heard God’s promise a Saviour, this time directly to Abram. Abram, whose name would later be changed to Abraham by God, received some of God’s greatest promises in the Old Testament. These promises were the foundation for Israel’s confidence for their salvation and as them being God’s chosen people. Unfortunately the Jews did not fully recognize what God did promise.

Still, in today’s Old Testament reading we heard God’s promises to Abram which demonstrated God’s tremendous grace and blessings to Abram, while he was still in Haran. God made Abram three promises. God’s first promise was, “**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.**” Wow, God could have stopped right there and many of us would be satisfied with that. Yet, God continued with a second promise to Abram, “³ **I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse**”. Even better, not only will God make Abram’s name great but God will also bless Abram and those who bless him, and, God Himself will curse any who dishonours him. Could God’s promise get any better? Still God continues with a third and greatest promise to Abram, “**in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**”(Genesis 12:2-3) All the families of the earth will be blessed through one man. Amazing!... but you might ask what is the catch? That is the best part, God put no conditions on His promises and covenant with Abram.

Now, as already mentioned these three promises were the foundation of the covenant between God and Abram; with God doing everything; and Abram simply receiving everything. These promises are pure Gospel because they do not demand anything of Abram while giving him everything. These promises are even more remarkable when you consider Abram had no children, was already 75 years old, his wife was 65 year old! Still God promised Abram he

would become a great nation and through him all nations would be blessed. And “**Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.**”(Romans 4:3)

As a result of God’s promise and blessing, Abram took his wife and belongings, left everything and everyone he knew, and followed God. Abram followed to the land God promised him.

Interestingly, God never promised to give the land to Abram himself; rather God promised it to Abram’s offspring. The Land God promised to Abram and his offspring was to be a physical reminder of God’s blessings, grace, and presence with His people. In effect, the purpose for God giving Abram’s offspring the Promised Land was to give them a place to worship God. Abram demonstrated this as once he arrived in the Promised Land, Abram worshiped God, he built altars to God where he “**called on the name of the Lord.**”(Genesis 12:8) On those altars Abram would have offered sacrifices to God for His grace and favour. All of this point ahead to the offspring of Eve through Abram, namely Jesus Christ.

For God’s promise cannot be understood in simply a material sense, namely that it would be confined to the children of Abraham only since the words clearly indicate, this promise is to be extended to all nations, or families of the earth. Who else, shall we say, has poured out this blessing to all nations, on all people, except the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ?

It is important to contrast God’s promised blessing in this passage with the curse all people are under because of sin. We are all the children of Adam and Eve. We have all inherited Original Sin and we are all entirely and indisputably guilty of sinning daily, hourly, and most grievously against God. We were born cursed under the Law with no way to free ourselves, and through our sins have only condemned ourselves more. Apart from Christ we would not be a blessing to anyone, nor could we expect anything good from God, yet in Christ all this changes.

To understand this blessing we need to look back to Abram. Abram was a sinful man who lived in a sinful world. He deserved nothing for his actions, nor could he have boasted about anything before God. Still, God chose Abram out of all the people in the world to grant this underserved blessing on Abram. And as our Epistle records, “**and Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.**”(Romans 4:3) Abram believed God—Abram had faith in God and God’s Word of promise—and this trust was counted to Abram as righteousness. Abram was not righteous because of his actions, he was not righteous because of his faithfulness, Abram was not even righteous because of his works: Abram was declared righteous because of the faith he had received through the hearing of God’s Word and on account of Christ. This is how the curse of sin, death, and the devil was taken away from Abram. Faith in Christ and His completed work in your place takes the curse away from you.

Christ Jesus, our Lord was the one promised to Eve who would crush the serpent’s head and the devil’s power. Christ Jesus, our Saviour, came through Abram’s line to bless all nations by carrying our curse upon Himself and nailed it to the wooden cross. Christ is our blessing because He took our place before the judgement seat of God, Jesus paid for all our sins with His own body and blood, and Christ gave His life as the ransom for your life; so you would not die eternally but would live eternally in Him.

As Paul told the Romans, **“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.**

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ 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.”(Romans 3:13-17)

The good news is the curse has been taken away by Christ. Instead a blessing is poured out on all who hear Christ’s Word and believe in His name. Paul tells the Galatians how **“the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.** The Holy Spirit works to give life to those dead in sin and to call faith and trust in God into existence where none previously existed. The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel; by the hearing of God’s Word and by receiving the Sacraments. Together we share in the blessings of Abram through faith. One remarkable blessing is this, that after being freed from sin, from death, and from the tyranny of the devil, together we are in the company of the angels of God and have become partakers of eternal life, we are part of the holy Christian Church, and we are part of the communion of saint because of what God does in us on account of Jesus.

The blessing for all nations most clearly comes through the Gospel; the Good News of Jesus Christ. The service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God. The greatest possible comfort comes from this doctrine that the highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive the forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness. Here God comes to us with His Word and Sacrament for the forgiveness of all our sins.

In Baptism, through water and the Word, God pours out His blessings which are: the forgiveness of sins; our rescue from death and the devil; and eternal salvation to all who believe

the Word and promises of God.(SC Baptism) In Baptism He makes us His own, the Holy Spirit clothes us with Christ’s righteousness, and Christ Himself promises His continued presence with us always.

In God’s Word and Absolution, God blesses us through Christ and His forgiveness as God’s Word is proclaimed in its purity. The Law show us our sins, convict us of our unrighteousness and shows us our need for a Saviour. Yet, God’s Word of Gospel is also proclaimed—the Good News of Christ and His work for our salvation. He has come, He has paid for our sins, He has died, He is risen, and for His sake and in Him we have salvation. Christ’s work is most clearly revealed as we walk through Lent reflecting on the enormity of Christ’s sacrifice for each of us.

God’s blessing continues to come to us and all nations in and through the Lord’s Supper. Here God calls us to His table and freely gives us the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of all our sins.

Most Christians have the desire to be closer to Jesus. In the Old Testament the High Priest came closest to God when he entered past the veil and officiated in the Holy of Holies sprinkling blood of the lamb upon the Mercy Seat (Lev 16:15-16). In an even more profound manner we come closest to Jesus this side of eternity in Holy Communion where His crucified and risen body and blood are lovingly distributed.

In the Sacrament of the Altar Jesus joins Himself most intimately to us. He comes so close as to serve us the most precious gifts in the universe—the very means with which He purchased our salvation—the life-giving fruits of His Sacrifice on the cross: namely His body and His blood. To commune is to be in intimate communication with something, and one can’t be in a closer communion with the Holy Son of God and receive His blessings than to eat His body and drink His blood.(John 6)

Christ Jesus is the blessing promised to Abram for all people and all nations including you and me. Jesus is the one who is coming to you this day with His gifts and His salvation. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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