

February 26, 2021

Lectionary Passages:

Psalm 22:23-31
Genesis 16:1-6
Romans 4:1-12



Selected Verses:

The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.
May your hearts live forever! – Psalm 22: 26

So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife.

– Genesis 16: 3

If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. – Romans 4: 2-4

Devotional:

Today, the House of Representatives will vote on another Coronavirus Relief Bill. If passed by the House and the Senate, most Americans will receive another stimulus check. In the arguments, some say, "The American people deserve this." Not wanting to be political, yet any stimulus check is a gift. As a gift, by definition, it is not something you deserve. We might expect gifts or exchange gifts. Yet, a gift undeserved. Nobody deserves a gift.

I jokingly comment that I am thankful my birthday is ten days before Janet's. That way, I know how much she spent on me, so I know how much to spend on her. In reality, is it truly a gift if you simply spend the same amount on each other? Are not the best gifts things that come unexpected? Or, when you are not able to repay it? It was truly a gift last week when others shoveled the snow since I could not.

As a pastor, I often help people in need. Usually, they stop by the office asking for help. I am able to use my pastor's discretion fund to help with food, rent or gas. Since I have a fund, I am a bit more liberal with my giving. Someone cannot pay for all their groceries; I can help out. In cases like this, it is truly a gift. The person cannot repay me, since they don't know me. They might pay it forward, but there are no expectations. And, they have done nothing to deserve it.

In all three passages today, salvation is seen as a gift. Even Abraham did not earn his righteousness. It was given to him by God as a gift. God had made a promise to Abraham, yet it had been ten years since that promise. Both Abraham and Sarah were getting older, and beyond the age of having children. In the end, Abraham listened to his wife instead of trusting God. Like

all of us, Abraham did not follow God completely. He fell short. He sinned. Yet, God gave him the gift of righteousness. Abraham did not earn it.

Maybe this is why scripture is filled with passages that the poor will eat and be satisfied. During this pandemic, there has been a greater call for food to help the hungry. Even so, they will never be satisfied. No amount of stimulus checks or minimum wage increases will satisfy the hungry. In fact, maybe the poor and hungry are able to realize that the true gift of satisfaction comes from a relationship with God. The rich feel satisfied, yet know something is still lacking. There is a hunger that only the gift of God's salvation can bring.

As a lifelong follower of Jesus Christ, I need to remind myself that I have received the gift of salvation. All my work is in response to the gift God has freely given. When we realize that it is truly a gift, we do want to pass it on, pay it forward. The gift of salvation is given to us and we are able to share the gift of God's love with others. God's salvation was first shown to Abraham and his descendants for the purpose of all people having the opportunity to receive it. May we share God's gift with others today.

Prayer:

Holy God, we live such cluttered lives. Society deluges us with messages that we need and deserve and find status in more stuff. We do not realize that to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly doesn't require us to own one material thing. Forgive us. Help us turn from our destructive patterns of accumulation and seek first your kingdom and righteousness. In Jesus' name we pray.