

Epworth Chapel on the Green
March 17, 2019
Second Sunday in Lent
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Genesis 15:1-18
Psalm 27:10-18
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:22-35

In our epistle lesson today, the apostle Paul calls on the Philippians to rise above *earthly* things and *earthly* thinking by imitating his life and example.

He does so because his own life is patterned after that of Christ. He seeks to imitate Christ. As we continue our Lenten journey, these words from Paul can have significant meaning for us as well.

For Lent is a good time for us to do the very thing Paul calls on the Philippians to do, namely, to rise above *earthly* things and *earthly* thinking by focusing on the example of Christ and imitating others who have done so.

The primary way Paul frames this discussion is by drawing a contrast between an *eternal* perspective and mindset and a *temporal* perspective or mindset. Some people, says Paul, have a limited perspective on life and reality. They live only for the moment, with no thought about the long range consequences of their actions.

Because of that, they cast off all restraint and lead lives of complete self-indulgence. They don't deny themselves anything. They become willing slaves of their own appetites. They are totally absorbed with themselves. They prove true

the old adage that says: “When you are all wrapped up in yourself, you make a very small package.”

Such persons, Paul says, are enemies of the Cross of Christ. Their lives are patterned not after Christ and his selfless sacrifice, but instead on their own selfish and shortsighted desires. Their view of reality begins and ends with what surrounds them, what they can immediately see.

But if we attempt to imitate Paul’s example and the example of Christ, we understand that this world is not our home. We are citizens of heaven. Because we are merely sojourning here on earth for awhile, we do not become too attached to the things of this world and to the attitudes of this world. We are cultivating an eternal, long-range perspective.

One of the benefits of an eternal perspective is that we begin to see that reality is more than what immediately confronts us. This was the lesson Abraham had to learn in our Old Testament lesson, was it not?

Abraham was confronted with a great challenge. God had promised him that God would bless the world through Abraham’s descendants. But now he and Sarah are old, and they do not have a son. And the immediate reality that confronts Abraham tells him that the chances of God’s promise coming to pass are not good. That’s the earthly, temporal perspective.

But the eternal perspective trains us to see that there is more to reality than what we can see. In fact, the bulk of what is real is *unseen*.

And Abraham was challenged to cultivate this eternal perspective. To have faith in unseen reality. To believe a promise whose fulfillment was yet in the future. God took Abraham out and showed him the stars and said, “Count them if you can. Your descendants will be greater in number than those stars.”

And Abraham has a choice to make. Is reality limited to what is earthly, what is immediately observable? Or is reality found in what is *unseen* as well as what is seen?

Abraham decided that perhaps there was more to truth than what he could immediately perceive. And so he chose to believe God’s promise.

The writer of the book of Hebrews says that faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.”

I’d like to offer you another definition of faith this morning: **Faith is rising above earthly thinking and earthly things by imitating the life of Jesus.** Faith is learning to see with an eternal perspective. Faith is learning to live as a citizen of heaven while you’re here on earth.

And the Lenten journey affords us the chance each year to ask ourselves some important questions. With the help of the Apostle Paul, we might ask ourselves: *How closely am I tied to the things of this world? Does my thinking*

*and my lifestyle reflect the values of the culture, or does my life follow a different pattern? Am I investing my life in things that are important to Jesus, or am I an enemy of his Cross? Am I trying to be a follower of Jesus on **his** terms, or on my terms?*

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, there are a couple things of which I am certain. First, each of us patterns our lives after something (or someone), whether we realize it or not. Each of us, through the small and large choices we make every day, is cultivating a perspective on life -- whether a *temporal* perspective or an *eternal* perspective.

Second, I'm certain of this. The God of Abraham, the God whom we serve, is a gracious and merciful God. And at this Table he gives us grace for our journey. He can cultivate in us an eternal perspective which allows us to live as citizens of heaven while we're sojourning here on earth. He can give us grace to pattern our lives after Jesus, and to imitate those who have gone before us in the faith.

And the bread and wine which we receive today is God's pledge to us that his promises are true for us, even as they were true for those who've gone before.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.