

## Resources for Parish worship



“Faith” is a word that is used all the time in religious circles, in Christian worship, and even in political discourse. Unfortunately, all too often, the way we use the word is a shadow of the richness, vitality and challenge of the biblical meaning. This week the Lectionary allows us to eavesdrop on a conversation about faith between Jesus and a rather hesitant visitor who comes to him at night – and what Nicodemus heard from Jesus was both shocking and surprising.

### INTRODUCTIONS

*For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines. These may be included in the Parish Magazine, in the weekly service sheet, or by the*

*lector as an introduction to the readings.*

### **Genesis 12 : 1-4a**

Last Sunday we heard the sad tale of mankind’s first disobedience. This reading is a happier circumstance, with consequences just as far-reaching. God’s demand to Abraham is to start anew - to be ‘new-born’ as Jesus later told Nicodemus. Because Abraham is totally obedient, God’s purpose can be in his chosen people.

### **Romans 4 : 1-5, 13-17**

Paul uses Abraham as an example of complete faith. It is not through obedience to law that God accepted and used him, and it is not our good deeds which justify us. By the sheer grace of God we too are inheritors of God’s promises.

### **John 3:1-17**

Nicodemus comes to speak to Jesus at night, and is told that he must be born of the Spirit in order to see God's reign, and that Christ came into the world to save through faith, not to condemn and judge. OR -

### **Matthew 17 : 1-9**

The Lord's closest friends see him transfigured upon a mountain-top, in a disclosure of his true identity. In the presence of the figures of Moses and Elijah, a cloud of glory comes upon him and the voice of the holy one is heard.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

[http://bible.oremus.org/?show\\_adj=no&passages=Genesis%2012:%201-4a%0Acw%20Psalm%2021%0ARomans%204:%201-5,%2013-17%0AJohn%203:%201-17](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Genesis%2012:%201-4a%0Acw%20Psalm%2021%0ARomans%204:%201-5,%2013-17%0AJohn%203:%201-17)

## **LECTIONARY NOTES 1**

### **Genesis 12:1-4a**

"So Abram went" - ah, I can't imagine just up and going like Abram did. What courage he must have had.

Why did he go? God laid out a vision and a promise to him, which Abram found compelling enough to take risks for. As a church, perhaps that is also what we need to do: lay out a compelling vision for where we are going. Then, perhaps, people will have the courage to go with us as we seek to follow God.

"I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse." Not sure how I feel about this. But God is protecting God's promise here, however you look at it. Protecting the vision God wants to see come into fullness. *By Beth Quick*

### **Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**

This was a text I studied carefully when I was writing a paper my freshman year of [college](#) on *sola fide*. Ah, how enlightened I was. But the texts I used still bring me straight back to the paper I was working on: are we saved by faith or works? We answer faith with our lips, but sometimes works with our

actions and attitudes. "it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace."

Paul is good at emphasizing the heart of saving faith: God's grace. It is not our faith but better stated God's grace alone that saves us. Paul argues that Abraham was justified not by works but by faith, which was credited to him as "righteousness."

"and calls into existence the things that do not exist." God is calling us into existence - I like that, a very process-theology sort of statement. Who is God calling you to be?

*By Beth Quick*

## LECTIONARY NOTES 2

### John 3:1-17

The clear focus of this week's readings is the idea of faith or believing. Abram, believing God's promise, sets out from his home to a new land. The Psalm expresses deep faith in the God who protects and cares for God's people. Paul emphasises Abraham's faith as the doorway into relationship with God, and invites believers to embrace a similar faith in Christ. And Nicodemus, coming to Jesus in the night, is invited to be born again, born from above, in order to see God's reign, and to recognise that Jesus is the one who came to bring life – salvation – to those who believe. The call to faith is unavoidable here, but, of course, the question it raises is this: what is faith? Is it simply an intellectual agreement with certain propositions? Or is it something deeper? The key lies in the conversation with Nicodemus, where faith and the new birth are brought together by Jesus. This faith, then, is not just accepting ideas in the mind. It is an experience of new birth. It is a completely new way of being that enables us to 'see', to 'know' God's reign and then to live out of this new birth as leaves driven by the wind. This is certainly more than just signing a pledge card, or praying a specific prayer in order to be "saved". This believing is completely transforming, and must, therefore, like birth and the life which follows it, be a growing, developing experience that is embraced anew each day.

### **CONNECTING WITH LIFE:**

**GLOBAL APPLICATION:** If there is anything that our world needs today, it is faith. In the face of cynical partisan politics, divisive and cynical polarisation around issues as diverse as climate change and abortion, and faith communities that offer nothing but negative, cynical or doom-saying assessments of the world, it is both prophetic and healing to live and speak

from a position of faith. As we engage the world and its struggles from a deep faith in the God who is at work to save creation, we cannot help but offer hope and connection to all we encounter – whether we agree with them or not. As we engage people with the faith that they are created in God’s image, and that God is at work in their lives, we cannot do other than embrace them in Christ’s name and call out the God-imagined glory within them. Such faith must lead to completely different responses to the challenges of our world. Greed and hoarding is a symptom of a lack of faith in God’s provision, and leads to poverty for others. War is a lack of faith in God’s protection, and leads to escalating violence and insecurity. The refusal to address issues of justice is a lack of faith in God’s resources within us to make a contribution, and leads to ongoing disparity and suspicion between “the haves” and “the have nots”, between the perpetrators and victims of injustice. If we can begin to live in faith, though, we may appear foolish or even naive, but it will make a huge impact on the big issues of our world. Just a few faithful people really can make a big difference.

**LOCAL APPLICATION:** In our churches it is easy to reduce faith to a system of ideas that we call our people to accept. It is easy to make salvation nothing more than praying the right prayer and signing the right card. But, if we do this, we rob our people of the true power and value of faith. A faith that is simply a set of ideas does not lead us to new birth. It does not change our very lives and give us a new way of seeing or a God’s-reign way of being – which may be why Christians are so often accused of being hypocrites. The faith of Abraham that Paul calls us to experience, the faith that leads to new birth, which Jesus offered to Nicodemus, is a transforming encounter with a God who leads us into a whole new world – the world of God’s reign, where children are the leaders, the meek inherit the earth, and the poor, the mourners and the peace makers are the recipients of God’s presence and grace. Once we have embraced this faith, we cannot help but begin to live this new life in such a way that it makes a difference in our families, our places of work and leisure, our communities and our churches. Once we have been born anew, we find ourselves recognising Christ in those we would normally shun, and we begin to care about issues that we would normally ignore. It is not our obedience that leads us to life – as Paul points out – but our faith. However, faith that does not change who we are and how we live, is not faith at all. Ultimately believing does not happen in our heads alone, but in our whole being, and in lives that in small but significant ways, touch the least with grace and compassion, and seek to make the world a more hopeful, celebratory and gracious place.

## COLLECTS OF THE DAY

### Collect One

Almighty God,  
who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves;  
Keep us both outwardly in our bodies,  
and inwardly in our souls;  
that we may be defended from all adversities  
which may happen to the body,  
and from all evil thoughts  
which may assault and hurt the soul;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Collect Two

Almighty God,  
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth  
that they may return to the way of righteousness:  
Grant to all those who are admitted  
into the fellowship of Christ's religion,  
that they may reject those things  
that are contrary to their profession,  
and follow all such things  
as are agreeable to the same;  
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

Trusting in God's assurance that Jesus came not to condemn, but to save, let us  
lift our voices to God. We pray, "Through the gift of your Son," and respond,  
"Amen."

Let us pray for the renewal of the church.  
God of Abraham and Sarah, renew your church that we might bring the  
gospel to  
our present world with relevance and faithfulness. We pray through the gift of  
your  
Son, **Amen.**

Let us pray for all who draft environmental policies.

God of All Creation, you have given us life and made the good earth to sustain us. Awaken in our politicians and corporate leaders a sense of awe for your creation, so no one will exploit it as a commodity, but will treasure it as a gift from you. We pray through the gift of your Son, **Amen.**

Let us pray for those struggling with loss of faith. O Persistent God, you know the depth of our fears and the emptiness of our doubt; you keep faith with us when we have no faith in you. Be with all who struggle under the weight of their questions, that even while their doubt will not go away, they may know that you will not leave them. We pray through the gift of your Son, **Amen.**

Let us pray for our own renewal as children of God. God of Death and Rebirth, give us new life that we might see your kingdom with clear vision and live with restored courage. As we grow old, may we ever grow new in grace. We pray through the gift of your Son, **Amen.**

Bless all for whom we pray, O God, and bring us to newness of life through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

*Presider or deacon*

God sent the Son into the world to save the world. As we prepare for the paschal feast, let us earnestly beseech God to grant all peoples everywhere new birth in the Spirit.

*Deacon or other leader*

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, a sign on earth of the kingdom of God.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For *NN* our catechumen(s) and *NN* their sponsors(s), and for all who wish to be born of the Spirit.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For all who share the faith of Abraham, and for all nations and families of the earth.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For all who are tempted, oppressed, afflicted, or in need.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For the dying and the dead.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For our families, friends, and companions, and for all those we love.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Remembering *N* (*Parish patronal saint*), and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

Blessed are you, God of Abraham and Sarah, who made of your people a great nation. Receive the prayers we offer this day for all those in need in every place and bless us as we come to your altar; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 3**

- P Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.
- P Lord Jesus Christ, You came down from heaven to die for the sins of the entire world. Through the good news of Your salvation, send Your Holy Spirit into the hearts of those who do not yet cling to You for salvation. Work faith in the hearts of all unbelievers so that all who hear of Your mercy and compassion may receive the gift of forgiveness. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Almighty God, give to Your Church a sense of urgency in proclaiming the good news of Your salvation. Magnify the power of the Gospel in the hearts of Your faithful people so that they may search for those who live apart from You. Instill in them love for lost sheep and, by Your Word and Sacrament, grant them boldness and confidence as they provide a Christian witness in both word and deed to those You place in their lives. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P O God, source of all abiding knowledge, through Word and Spirit You both enlighten the minds and sanctify the lives of those whom You draw to Your service. Look with favor on the seminaries and colleges of the Church, blessing those who teach and those who learn, that all the baptized may apply themselves with ready diligence to their tasks and faithfully fulfill their service according to Your will. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Abide, O Gracious Father, with all those who are undergoing times of transition. Support them in times of change and surround them with caring Christian people so that they may find welcome and peace. Remind them that You will never leave them nor forsake them, and that even in the midst of change You are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P O Lord, by water and Spirit, You work forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and give eternal salvation. Grant to all those who suffer from injury, disease, or any type of pain the assurance that they are baptized into Your Holy Name (*especially* \_\_\_\_\_). Strengthen their faith, so that despite their struggles, they may always remain Your dear children. Deal compassionately with Your servants, and bless them with Your healing power. We commit them to Your gracious mercy and protection. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

P Eternal God, the Resurrection and the Life, by Your Word and Spirit strengthen all those who mourn (*especially* \_\_\_\_\_) with the knowledge that their loved one is at home in Your heavenly kingdom. Increase in all mourners the confidence that all who die in faith are with You in everlasting life and eternal peace. Give them courage to walk by



faith until that day when all who belong to You will be reunited around the throne of the Lamb. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** hear our prayer.

P O Lord, our God, make us ready this day to receive the most holy body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of all our sins, and grant us grateful hearts. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** Hear our prayer.

P Into Your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**C** Amen.

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 4

*Introduction (by the Presider)* Let us call on the Lord's name, praying with thanksgiving and trust.

1. For all the members of the Church, as we continue on our lenten journey — we pray (*Pause for silent prayer*). Lord, hear us.
2. For those preparing to become members of the Christian community at Easter time — we pray (*Pause for silent prayer*). Lord, hear us.
3. For the Jewish people of every country, the sons and daughters of Abraham — we pray (*Pause for silent prayer*). Lord, hear us.
4. For those who are starving in this world of plenty — we pray (*Pause for silent prayer*). Lord, hear us.
5. For our community, and particularly for people who are lonely or fearful — we pray (*Pause for silent prayer*). Lord, hear us.
6. For those who have gone before us in faith (especially N & N who died recently and N & N whose anniversaries occur) — we pray (*Pause for silent prayer*). Lord, hear us.

*Conclusion (by the Presider)* Loving God, we are your servants who trust in you, even in the midst of affliction: hear our prayers and help us to walk in your presence all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## POST COMMUNION

Creator of heaven and earth,  
we thank you for these holy mysteries  
given us by our Lord Jesus Christ,  
by which we receive your grace

and are assured of your love,  
which is through him now and for ever.

## PRAYERS

God of wilderness and water,  
your Son was baptised and tempted as we are.  
Guide us through this season,  
that we may not avoid struggle,  
but open ourselves to blessing,  
through the cleansing depths of repentance  
and the heaven-rending words of the Spirit. Amen.

Artist of souls,  
you sculpted a people for yourself  
out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.  
Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and simplicity,  
that the discipline of these forty days  
may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy friendship,  
and whet our thirst for the living water you offer  
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

God of the covenant,  
in the glory of the cross  
your Son embraced the power of death  
and broke its hold over your people.  
In this time of repentance,  
draw all people to yourself,  
that we who confess Jesus as Lord  
may put aside the deeds of death  
and accept the life of your kingdom. Amen.

God of the living,  
through baptism we pass from the shadow of death  
to the light of the resurrection.  
Remain with us and give us hope  
that, rejoicing in the gift of the Spirit  
who gives life to our mortal flesh,  
we may be clothed with the garment of immortality,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of the covenant,  
you call us to be fruitful servants within creation,  
and to offer our lives  
as the foundation of your realm.

We lay before you the desires of our hearts,  
that we may be transformed by their fulfillment.

Grant, O God, that the prayers we offer  
may be your channel for new and abundant life  
not only hoped for,  
but worked for,  
through faithful word and deed. Amen.

God of amazing compassion,  
lover of our wayward race,  
you bring to birth a pilgrim people,  
and call us to be a blessing for ourselves and all the world.  
We pray for grace to take your generous gift  
and step with courage on this holy path,  
confident in the radiant life that is your plan for us,  
made known and given in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## SERMON OUTLINE

### **John 3.1-17 a man of the Pharisees..**

We focus on an unusual encounter which took place *by night* – peace & quiet away from the crowds – to avoid being seen?

**1. The Seeker** – Nicodemus – highly respected – *a ruler of the Jews* – 71 member Sanhedrin/Court...

**a) his Quest** – to learn more about Jesus...

**i) recognised his Person** – he who had heard many so many highly educated and learned intellectuals of his time –and now here was the special one - *a teacher come from God*

**ii) realised his Power** – seen in the distinctive miracles of Jesus - *no man can do these signs that thou doest except God be with him...*

**b) his Questions** – as Jesus affirms: *Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God* – Nicodemus took Jesus literally rather than spiritually.. *‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’*

**2. The Spirit** – *except a man be born of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* – ref to the importance of the work of Holy Spirit in the life of

the individual...<sup>8</sup>*The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*'

**3. The Saviour** – points to his saving death – ref Old Testament:- <sup>14</sup>*And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,* <sup>15</sup>*that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.* – a reference to the plague in the wilderness recorded in Exodus – those who looked to the bronze serpent were saved from certain death... So may we in faith and trust look to Jesus!

*By Norman Portreous*

## SERMON

Although we have many visible and tangible supports on our Christian path, such as scripture, worship, the sacraments, and our faith community, that last “two inches” of our Christian journey is built on faith. Faith in things that we cannot see. To follow Christ requires faith.

The architecture of Saint David's Episcopal Church in San Diego, California, is quite intriguing. From the parking lot, a long, winding path leads to the sanctuary, landscaped with trees and plants indigenous to the Holy Land. Walking through the olive trees and fragrant flowers, the first part of the sanctuary seen is a solid, cracked, unfinished concrete portico extending from the worship space. The stark brokenness of the entry is startling. Even more shocking is the support, or lack thereof; it appears to be held up by two massive concrete pillars, but when one looks closely, the pillars stop two inches below the overhang. It appears that there is nothing supporting the massive, cracked concrete structure. A wary guest recently asked, “Is it structurally sound?”

The answer is yes; it was constructed in full compliance with the state's building codes. But the architects intentionally designed the real support to be invisible. The entry to that sanctuary represents all people as we come to Christ broken and unfinished, and although we have many visible and tangible supports on our Christian path, such as scripture, worship, the sacraments, and our faith community, that last “two inches” of our Christian journey is built on faith. Faith in things that we cannot see. To follow Christ requires faith.

In today's reading from Genesis, we hear the story of God's call to Abram. In this reading we hear God tell Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred

and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 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." And Abram said yes to God. Abram went. And not only did Abram go, but so did his nephew Lot and wife Sarai. Picture how that conversation must have unfolded. One can only imagine the scene as Abram, a senior citizen, informs his elderly wife and nephew of his encounter with God, and that they are all to leave their country and head to the land that God will show them. While we are not privy to the conversation, we see that, in the end, the group must have together discerned that this was a call from God and acted with faith, despite their fear and doubt.

Abram's response to God's call teaches to us to have faith when we discern God's gentle voice in our lives. We are to act with faith and go forward, even when it means embarking on a scary, uncharted course. Is there a new path, a new journey, a new way of being that God is calling you to this morning? Maybe you feel God calling you to a new ministry within your church, or a new vocation, or a new profession or workplace, but you have been afraid for some reason to act. Maybe you are passionate about something that is unjust in the world around you, but you have never been brave enough to be a voice or to act for transformative change. Or maybe there is something that you've needed to give up to fully live out God's call – an addictive behavior, angry reactions, or other destructive behaviors. Lent is the time to both embrace new life and let go of those things that stand in the way of our fully following God's call. Like Abram, if after careful discernment, our sense of call is affirmed, we are to trust in God and act in faith.

But sometimes it can be hard to hear God's message. In this morning's reading we hear the story of the Pharisee Nicodemus, coming to Jesus in the dark of night – a powerful leader who comes to a peripatetic preacher in the darkness of night for illumination. Clearly he senses God in Jesus, yet he seems to have tremendous difficulty hearing and understanding Jesus' new teachings as their conversation unfolds. Perhaps he is too rooted in the world, and with those things with which he is familiar, to hear Jesus' radical new message of love that paves the way to eternal life.

As followers of Jesus, are we like Nicodemus? Coming to God from a place of darkness, yet being unable to hear Jesus' call to new life? Are we, for whatever reason, actually choosing to stay in a place of darkness, hands over our ears like children, chanting, "I can't hear you," over and over again?

Fortunately, God continues to call. This morning we hear Jesus illuminate the path to new life once again. In today's familiar words from the gospel of John, we hear of God's enormous love for the world, a love so great that the path to

eternal life is opened to all. All that is asked of us is to believe. To have faith. Like opening the shutters to the morning sun, Jesus brings light to not only the darkness of our lives, but to the darkness of the world. "For God came not to condemn the world, but to save it."

Did Nicodemus finally hear Jesus and act with faith? Or did he leave that night, and continue to live in the darkness? We really don't know. But what we do know is that if we truly seek new life, Jesus has outlined the way. And like Abram, like Nicodemus, we have a choice. We can choose to retreat back to the cave of darkness, or we can hear God's call and walk toward the light of Christ in faith, trusting that, like the church in San Diego, the broken, cracked overhang of our lives really is supported by unseen structures.

— *The Rev. Suzanne E. Watson currently serves as priest-in-charge at [Saint David's Episcopal Church](#) in San Diego, California. Prior to moving to San Diego she served at the Episcopal Church Center in New York City for over three year in the areas of strategic planning and collaboration, Center direction, and small church ministries. She has also served in congregations in New Zealand and Carmel, California. She is a graduate of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific and a proud mum of three teens and a tween.*

## ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

**A Different Kind of Dream.** Excerpt : Luckily, we are given some help within the story itself. There are two parts to this passage: what happens on the mountain (strange as it is) and the discussion about it as they come down from the mountain. Did you notice? Beginning in v. 9, Mark tells us what Jesus has to say about the whole event: "As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead." It may not seem like much help, but it is. Let me explain.

I think in some ways it's like watching a movie on DVD, with those special features, like watching it in French or out-takes, that kind of thing. Only in this case, it's like Mark has provided the director's comments. We see the story unfold, but we also get interpretive clues.

<http://day1.org/3551-a-different-kind-of-dream>

**More on The Transfiguration at -**  
<http://day1.org/topic/transfiguration>

## CHILDREN

**Sermons4kids** - Talk based on Matthew 17:5. God confirms that Jesus is His Son. Visuals - several bumper stickers  
[http://sermons4kids.com/that\\_settles\\_it.htm](http://sermons4kids.com/that_settles_it.htm)

**Word - Sunday**

<http://www.word-sunday.com/index.html>

**HYMN SUGGESTIONS**

[My Faith Looks Up To Thee](#)

[Breathe On Me, Breath Of God](#)

[The God Of Abraham Praise](#)

[If Thou But Suffer God To Guide Thee](#)

[My Redeemer Lives](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[I Believe That God Appeared In Human Form](#) (*Link takes you to lyrics. The tune is the famous "I believe that every drop of rain that falls..." that has been sung by many famous performers.*)

[Give Thanks](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Now To Live The Life](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)