

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Luke 13:31-35 – “Covenants of Compassion”

Lents offers the chance to seek out the depth and demand of God’s biblical promise and covenant with us – right in the mainly messy midst of our everyday lives – and life together. There is the uncountable and incalculable grandeur of the promise Abraham envisions – followed by messy details of covenanting to make the promise flesh at whatever the cost. As anxious and impatient as Abraham is for an actual, visible, earthly heir (“of his own,” as we say), God challenges him to expand his vision to all the stars! To imagine connection to a whole universe of descendants!

I am reminded of our first images of Earth from outer space: No boundaries, no borders, no barriers – just this fragile and beautiful “pale blue dot” dangling there for all to embrace and cherish. That vision challenges me to ask, How big is my world? My Earth? How big is my human family? How complex and diverse? (After all, Abraham becomes “father” to three worldwide faith traditions!) How expansive and inclusive? Above all, what kind of world do I hope for my children? My grandchildren? The next seven generations? How big is my God?

As grand as that vision is, it is yet to be fully grounded and fully worked out in the nitty-gritty details of our everyday lives. How do we include migrant and immigrant workers and families in our own visions of nation, community, family? There’s a Charlie King folksong with the chorus, “Our work is more than our job, and our life is more than our work.” The expanding vision of Abraham invites us to see our sisters and brothers as much more than the jobs they do – indispensable as their work is to the well-being of all.

Each child of God, each member of the human family, is entitled not only to a job, but also to the work of their lives – a vocation, a gift and calling that comes from our very creation – the promise of God! We deserve justice, a place at the table, for the whole person each of us is made to be. Each of us is entitled not only to a job and a work but to a life! To a whole life, with identity, with relationship, with community, with culture. Not only jobs, not only justice, but in all things, joy! The chance to be glad just for being alive.

God’s vision is always both for people and for land – the promised land in everyone’s life. Land is the essential resource of God’s provision. Access to land, assurance of a share in land’s riches, is an essential issue of justice for peoples of biblical faith. Not only are we to give a hungry person a fish, as we say – to meet their immediate need. Not only are we then to teach a hungry person to fish – to they can begin to meet their own needs. But also we have then to make and maintain room at the pond – so hungry people can get to the fish, and fish will still be there for them!

Jesus knows it is not enough for those who “have” so much only to extend acts of personal charity to those who “have not.” Jesus knows for a prophet, for a

prophetic message, the city of “Jerusalem” – like Lakeland, Tallahassee, Washington, DC – represents concentrations of powers – economic, political, religious. Such powers and principalities must be confronted, challenged, chastened, changed – in order that access and opportunity, justice and dignity be built into the covenant. The covenant is only as strong as its weakest and neediest parties. Farmworkers live and work lowest on the “food chain,” closest to the Earth, that the rest of us might eat. Imagine a covenant of mutual accountability in which owners, growers, buyers, sellers, regulators, consumers, *and workers* engage and negotiate in good faith for the common good!

Jesus, with the inclusive, indiscriminate justice of a mothering hen (among “foxes” like Herod!) – Jesus, taking his place with the lowliest, the poorest and most vulnerable, the hardest-working and least-paid, often the immigrant, especially the migrant farmworker – Jesus cries out against hardening hearts in the highest of places and positions. Jesus’ suffering, the passion of God’s compassion – like his whole life and work – points to the passion of others, even the struggle of masses, whole peoples of others. God enters our history through the passion of “no people” at all but slaves in Egypt. Jesus confronting Jerusalem connects all the world’s suffering – the sins of all the world’s suffering – with our own lives.

Who in the world would Jesus exclude or deny, oppress or exploit, hurt or destroy? We follow in faith that for Jesus, whose work is never done, whose work is ours – and beyond – there is always a “third day,” a resurrection, a promise, a covenant even death cannot keep the God of Life from keeping.

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