

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 2nd Sunday of Lent, March 5, 2023

The theme for today is Assurance. Assurance with a capital A. Assurance that is convincing and therefore comforting.

There's a very reassuring Psalm (**Psalm 121**). "The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore." It doesn't get much better than that.

In the Genesis passage (**Genesis 12:1-4a**), God assures Abram that he and his people will be blessed. God is going to make of them a "great nation." And not only will God bless them, God will curse the enemies of Abram.

In his message to the Romans (**Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**), Paul assures his audience that adherents to faith will fare better than adherents to law. "For law," Paul claims, "brings wrath." Faith, on the other hand, depends on grace, which God controls.

And then we have the passage from the Gospel of John (**John 3:1-17**). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Scripture doesn't get more positive than this.

What an "Assurance" line-up. Though you and I are two thousand years away from God's conversation with Abram, we are comforted, just as Abram was comforted.

Now, as comforting as these lessons are, there is still the challenge of adopting these lessons as our own. Is it possible to be assured of Divine love when there seems to be evidence to the contrary? It's hard to listen to the evening news without wondering whether God really is in charge of this whole enterprise we call life.

Yet, here we are, inspired again by these passages of scripture, the reassuring hymns, and the good-will that this congregation generates. Whatever else is

going on in the world and in our lives, our faith in the Lord and in one another remains strong.

Too easy? Too good to be true? Not enough critical thinking? “No, no, no” is our response. Not because faith is easy. Not because faith is too good to be true. And not because we don’t apply critical thinking. Quite the opposite. We wrestle with our faith. We have come to it through hard work. It doesn’t hide anything. Our faith is tested daily through the hardships of others and our own set of challenges.

And where does it say that goodness and truth can’t be partners? Our faith in the Lord is not casual. We think about it a lot. And we keep coming down on the side of validity. We know that our faith has helped us get through challenges. And we also know that there are many challenges ahead. We see these challenges in our own lives and in the lives of others. Your faith, the way you attack the world, is assuring. And, God-willing, we can be rocks for others.

Indeed critical thinking is central to the Judeo-Christian Faith. We ask the tough theoretical questions. We grapple with unwanted and unexpected events. We wrestle with our own doubts. But we continue to come down on the side of accepting challenge as a given in life, and practicing a faith that acknowledges these challenges.

Now, if we didn’t receive assurances from the Holy Spirit, and assurances from one another, and assurances through the lessons that life teaches, we would be a really unhappy lot. But that’s not who we are. From John’s Gospel (**John 3:17**): “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

With our help, of course, but it is God who sets the rules, who sets the parameters, who is born, lives and dies as one of us, and rises to new life as one of us. This is a Good Ship to be on. I wouldn’t trade this experience of faith for anything. And we’re together on that score. What a joy and what a privilege.

And look at how we have come to this point. The staying power of Faith in a loving God is remarkable. Every generation could have thrown up its arms in disappointment and disbelief. But that hasn’t happened. That very fact is

incredibly strong evidence that what God said to Abraham (**Genesis 12:1-4a**) and what Paul said to the Romans (**Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**) and what God said to John (**John 3:1-17**) and what Jesus says to you and me in private prayer and public action is what today's Collect calls "unchangeable truth."

Now, there's a very interesting phrase: "unchangeable truth." Isn't "unchangeable" what "truth" is? Or what "truth" is supposed to be? If "truth" is "changeable," would it even be "truth"?

If you're looking for a Lenten exercise, wrestle with that one.

Of course, what is "truth" in one generation is not necessarily "truth" in the next generation. Don't we, as we learn more, adjust "truth"? Science is full of such adjustments. And, yes, our own lives are full of such adjustments.

So, where is our anchor? What can we hold on to steady ourselves in uncertain times? As we get buffeted about by all sorts of things, including our own behavior, our own use of freedom, what is there to steady us? That's what we crave, don't we? Steadiness! What we today are calling Assurance.

The Church Year, the Church calendar, is an anchor, isn't it? We can count on it. We can count on it to offer us, remind us, assure us of the Good News of the Creator of the Universe entering our history, our lives, as one of us, facing the challenges that we face, from birth to death and, yes, beyond, in the company of God's only begotten Son.

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea. An outpost of "unchangeable truth." Now, that's a service that people can count on. What we call **Assurance**. *Amen*.

Service of Holy Communion
Second Sunday of Lent – February March 5, 2023

Hymn 150

Forty days and forty nights thou wast fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty night tempted, and yet undefiled.

Should not we thy sorrow share and from worldly joys abstain,
fasting with unceasing prayer, strong with thee to suffer pain?

Then if Satan on us press, Jesus, Savior, hear our call!
Victor in the wilderness, grant we may not faint nor fall!

So shall we have peace divine: holier gladness ours shall be;
round us, too shall angels shine, such as ministered to thee.

Keep, O keep us, Savior dear, ever constant by thy side;
that with thee we may appear at the eternal Eastertide.

Page 355

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Let us pray.

Collect for Second Sunday of Lent

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading – Genesis 12:1-4a

Psalm 121

Second Reading – Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

Hymn 467 – Sing, my soul, his wondrous love

Sing, my soul, his wondrous love, who, from yon bright throne above,
ever watchful o'er our race, still to us extends his grace.

Heaven and earth by him were made; all is by his scepter swayed;
what are we that he should show so much love to us below?

God, the merciful and good, bought us with the Savior's blood,
and, to make salvation sure, guides us by his Spirit pure.

Sing, my soul, adore his Name! Let his glory by thy theme;
praise him till he calls thee home; trust his love for all to come.

Gospel – John 3:1-17

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John*Glory to you, Lord Christ*
The Gospel of the Lord.*Praise to you, Lord Christ.*

Sermon

Nicene Creed – page 358

*We believe in one God,
the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

Prayers of the People Form IV – page 388

Let us pray for the Church and for the world.

Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honor one another and serve the common good.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grant that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as he loves us.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles, and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

We commend to your mercy all who have died, that your will for them may be fulfilled; and we pray that we may share with all your saints in your eternal kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy. *Hear our prayer.*

Confession and Absolution – page 360

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

*Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.*

*We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. *Amen.*

The Peace – page 360

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

Announcements and Prepare the Altar

Eucharistic Prayer – page 361

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give him thanks and praise

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.*

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: this is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: this is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him.

Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Lord's Prayer

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Breaking of the Bread

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.
Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

The Gifts of God for the People of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Communion

Post Communion Prayer – BCP page 365

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

Hymn 495 – Hail, thou once despised Jesus!

Hail, thou once despised Jesus! Hail, thou Galilean King!
Thou didst suffer to release us; thou didst free salvation bring.
Hail, thou universal Savior, bearer of our sin and shame!
By thy merit we find favor: life is given through thy Name.

Paschal Lamb, by God appointed, all our sins on thee were laid;
by almighty love anointed, thou hast full atonement made.
All thy people are forgiven through the virtue of thy blood:
opened is the gate of heaven, reconciled are we with God.

Jesus, hail! enthroned in glory, there forever to abide;
all the heavenly hosts adore thee, seated at thy Father's side.
There for sinners thou art pleading: there thou dost our place prepare;
ever for us interceding, till in glory we appear.

Worship, honor, power, and blessing thou art worthy to receive;
highest praises, without ceasing, right it is for us to give.
Help, ye bright angelic spirits, all your noblest anthems raise;
help to sing our Savior's merits, help to chant Emmanuel's praise.

Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 2nd Sunday of Lent, March 5, 2023

The theme for today is Assurance. Assurance with a capital A. Assurance that is convincing and therefore comforting.

There's a very reassuring Psalm (**Psalm 121**). "The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time forth for evermore." It doesn't get much better than that.

In the Genesis passage (**Genesis 12:1-4a**), God assures Abram that he and his people will be blessed. God is going to make of them a "great nation." And not only will God bless them, God will curse the enemies of Abram.

In his message to the Romans (**Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**), Paul assures his audience that adherents to faith will fare better than adherents to law. "For law," Paul claims, "brings wrath." Faith, on the other hand, depends on grace, which God controls.

And then we have the passage from the Gospel of John (**John 3:1-17**). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Scripture doesn't get more positive than this.

What an "Assurance" line-up. Though you and I are two thousand years away from God's conversation with Abram, we are comforted, just as Abram was comforted.

Now, as comforting as these lessons are, there is still the challenge of adopting these lessons as our own. Is it possible to be assured of Divine love when there seems to be evidence to the contrary? It's hard to listen to the evening news without wondering whether God really is in charge of this whole enterprise we call life.

Yet, here we are, inspired again by these passages of scripture, the reassuring hymns, and the good-will that this congregation generates. Whatever else is

going on in the world and in our lives, our faith in the Lord and in one another remains strong.

Too easy? Too good to be true? Not enough critical thinking? “No, no, no” is our response. Not because faith is easy. Not because faith is too good to be true. And not because we don’t apply critical thinking. Quite the opposite. We wrestle with our faith. We have come to it through hard work. It doesn’t hide anything. Our faith is tested daily through the hardships of others and our own set of challenges.

And where does it say that goodness and truth can’t be partners? Our faith in the Lord is not casual. We think about it a lot. And we keep coming down on the side of validity. We know that our faith has helped us get through challenges. And we also know that there are many challenges ahead. We see these challenges in our own lives and in the lives of others. Your faith, the way you attack the world, is assuring. And, God-willing, we can be rocks for others.

Indeed critical thinking is central to the Judeo-Christian Faith. We ask the tough theoretical questions. We grapple with unwanted and unexpected events. We wrestle with our own doubts. But we continue to come down on the side of accepting challenge as a given in life, and practicing a faith that acknowledges these challenges.

Now, if we didn’t receive assurances from the Holy Spirit, and assurances from one another, and assurances through the lessons that life teaches, we would be a really unhappy lot. But that’s not who we are. From John’s Gospel (**John 3:17**): “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

With our help, of course, but it is God who sets the rules, who sets the parameters, who is born, lives and dies as one of us, and rises to new life as one of us. This is a Good Ship to be on. I wouldn’t trade this experience of faith for anything. And we’re together on that score. What a joy and what a privilege.

And look at how we have come to this point. The staying power of Faith in a loving God is remarkable. Every generation could have thrown up its arms in disappointment and disbelief. But that hasn’t happened. That very fact is

incredibly strong evidence that what God said to Abraham (**Genesis 12:1-4a**) and what Paul said to the Romans (**Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**) and what God said to John (**John 3:1-17**) and what Jesus says to you and me in private prayer and public action is what today's Collect calls "unchangeable truth."

Now, there's a very interesting phrase: "unchangeable truth." Isn't "unchangeable" what "truth" is? Or what "truth" is supposed to be? If "truth" is "changeable," would it even be "truth"?

If you're looking for a Lenten exercise, wrestle with that one.

Of course, what is "truth" in one generation is not necessarily "truth" in the next generation. Don't we, as we learn more, adjust "truth"? Science is full of such adjustments. And, yes, our own lives are full of such adjustments.

So, where is our anchor? What can we hold on to steady ourselves in uncertain times? As we get buffeted about by all sorts of things, including our own behavior, our own use of freedom, what is there to steady us? That's what we crave, don't we? Steadiness! What we today are calling Assurance.

The Church Year, the Church calendar, is an anchor, isn't it? We can count on it. We can count on it to offer us, remind us, assure us of the Good News of the Creator of the Universe entering our history, our lives, as one of us, facing the challenges that we face, from birth to death and, yes, beyond, in the company of God's only begotten Son.

St. Christopher-by-the-Sea. An outpost of "unchangeable truth." Now, that's a service that people can count on. What we call **Assurance**. *Amen*.

Lessons for 2nd Sunday of Lent – March 5, 2023

Collect: O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reign, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Genesis 12:1-4a

Now the Lord said to 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. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 121

I will lift my eyes to the hills;
from where is my help to come?
My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved
and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.
Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel
shall neither slumber nor sleep;
The Lord himself watches over you;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand,
So that the sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve you from all evil;
it is he who shall keep you safe.
The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in,
from this time forth for evermore.

Second Reading: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For 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. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly such faith is reckoned as righteousness. For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law, but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 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."

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel: John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 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." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended for heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Lessons for 2nd Sunday of Lent – March 5, 2023

Collect: O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reign, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

First Reading: Genesis 12:1-4a

Now the Lord said to 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. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 121

I will lift my eyes to the hills;
from where is my help to come?
My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved
and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.
Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel
shall neither slumber nor sleep;
The Lord himself watches over you;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand,
So that the sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve you from all evil;
it is he who shall keep you safe.
The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in,
from this time forth for evermore.

Second Reading: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For 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. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly such faith is reckoned as righteousness. For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law, but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 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."

The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel: John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 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." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended for heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”