

Saint Thomas' Church  
Lent IV  
March 31, 2019  
rmcneely+

Now we brethern, are the children of promise

Today, the fourth Sunday in Lent goes by a number of different names:

Laetare Sunday, named for the introit which begins with the English word: "rejoice". Laetare in Latin.

In England it is also known as Mothering Sunday and involves the tradition that all return to the church of their baptism, their mother church. In prior centuries, Mothering Sunday was a rare holiday for domestic servants who were given the day to visit their mothers, in a fashion somewhat akin to our Mother's Day.

The day is also celebrated as Rose Sunday

And the church takes a break from the Lenten ban on flowers  
And allows roses to grace the altar.  
Some churches even have rose colored vestments for the clergy  
and for the altar to celebrate the day.

For us here at St Thomas, today is the Fourth Sunday in Lent.

And we are free to call it by any of its other names  
And to observe any of its traditions.

This week, Paul reminds us of the Genesis story of

Abram,  
Sarah and Hagar.  
Isaac and Ishmael.

And John gives us his detailed account of the feeding of the 5,000.

Both

are departures from the lessons and gospels  
we have read since Septuagesima  
over the last six weeks.

Both are intertwined in the Lenten Message for today

This day  
in which we get a break  
from the boot camp  
of our Lenten discipline and work.

Our steps toward atonement with God.

The introit is quite appropriate,

This is a day to rejoice.

Let me try to tell you why.

First the Epistle and Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Paul reminds us that Abram and Sarah were without a child in their  
old age. The translators of the King James Version so politely say  
"they were well stricken with age".

Something I felt yesterday as I toiled in the garden doing  
much deferred yard work.

They had long since given up the thought of their own children  
When an angel of the Lord appeared to Abram and told him  
That he and Sara would have a son  
And they would be the founders of a great nation  
that would number more people  
than there are grains of sand on the beach.

Abram and Sarah were shocked

At first they believed the Promise of God.

But they became impatient

God fulfills His Promise in His own time.

Abram and Sarah gave up waiting for God.  
And instead took matters in their own hands  
and followed the Hebrew law  
that allowed Abram to father a child with a surrogate wife,  
one chosen by Sara.

And before long Abram had fathered a son,  
by the Egyptian bondswoman, Hagar,  
a slave/servant owned by Abram.

They called Abram's son, Ishmael  
By law Ishmael was the son of Abram and Sarah  
And enjoyed all the legal rights of a legitimate first born  
Hebrew son.

But before long Sarah became pregnant just as God had promised.  
And she had a son whom they named Isaac.  
You see: God always fulfills His promise.

So Abram and Sarah had two sons  
One by virtue of the Hebrew Law  
And one by the promise of God.

A serious inter family fight ensued when Hagar insisted that her  
son, Ishmael would inherit the vastly growing wealth of Abram  
And receive his blessing upon Abram's death.

Sarah insisted upon the same rights for her son Isaac.

Abram ultimately ruled in favor of Isaac and banished Hagar and  
Ishmael, who survived a trial in the desert with the help of God  
So the son of the law wandered to the area near Mt Sinai, the site  
where the 10 Commandments, the law, was delivered to Moses  
centuries later. Don't you just love how God works.

Ishmael founded the Ishmaelites, who were the perpetual protagonists of the Jews and it is through Ishmael that the muslims claim. The seed of the eternal conflict between Jews and muslims was planted.

That is the story that Paul eludes to in his Epistle.

He points out that all Christianity flows from Isaac

The son that was the product of the promise of God  
And not from the son who was conceived in the law,  
After Abram and Sarah abandoned God's promise and  
Took matters into their own hands.

So we are all Children of the promise of God.

And not children of the bondwoman/Egyptian/slave.

Paul points out that we are of the free

Not of the bondwoman.

We are Children of the Promise.

Now, the word "promise" has multiple meanings and Paul is cleverly using the word.

"Promise" also means: a reasonable ground for hope or expectation of future excellence or satisfaction as in "the child showed great promise as a musician".

Or perhaps, the children of promise had every reason to believe

That the Son of God  
Would save them from themselves, from their sins  
And restore them to the right and close relationship with  
God.

The promise of the Son of Abram and Sarah to lead a Nation  
And the promise of another Son, a messiah/saviour to restore mankind to God and to save us from the evil and death.

Both were fulfilled and both Sons  
 Showed great promise  
 The reasonable expectation of future excellence  
 And satisfaction.

St John gives us his detailed account of the feeding miracle.  
 Remember John is an eye witness to the events about which he  
 writes.

He writes with the knowledge that others have already told the  
 story.

With John we must not ignore the facts he relates  
 But will miss the strength of his writing if we don't search  
 for the deeper religious message of the story.

We all know what happened. Jesus fed 5,000 people with 5 barley  
 loaves and two fish. And after all had eaten a full meal  
 There were twelve baskets left over  
 One basket for each Apostle  
 or one basket for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

But in the miracle,  
 that was so important that each  
 of the 4 Gospelers wrote about it  
 and the feeding miracle is a Gospel 3 times each year.

In the miracle  
 Is the foretelling of the communion service  
 That He would institute a year later on Maundy Thurs

In the miracle is the mystical connection with the bread that was multiplied in the hands of the 5,000

And the bread of heaven the manna that God provided  
To the Hebrews as they and Moses wandered the dessert for 40 years

And Jesus as the bread of life.

John also points us to the compassion of Christ for the people in the crowd. He knew that Safeway was closed

And Domino's wasn't delivering that far from Jerusalem  
The people had no means to feed themselves and would be hungry.  
Something with which Jesus had personal experience from his 40 days in the dessert at the beginning of His ministry.

Jesus has compassion for us as He had for the people who gathered to Him

Compassion for

Our needs

Our prayers

Our healing

Our forgiveness

Our communion with Him; with God

And he would later make all of it possible

He promised that our prayers would be answered when we pray in His name

He promised that our sins could be forgiven

He promised that we could be with Him in communion during this life

And He promised that we could be with Him in eternity.

We are the children of promise

Of God's promise.

And we have a promising future

We need only

Obey our baptismal vows

Obey our confirmation vows

We need only

Love God with all our hearts minds and souls

And love each other as Jesus, the Christ has loved us

I promise.

Can you see why this is a day for rejoicing?