

The Canaanites Were in the Land

Lent 2

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Genesis 12:1-9

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus prayed to God the Father in John chapter seventeen saying: “While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me...But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world (John 17:12-16).”

Jesus prayed that prayer for His disciples, and He prayed it for you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. These words are from His highly priestly prayer, recorded just before His betrayal and arrest. Jesus Himself was arrested and put to death. Many of His apostles were arrested and Church history records that many were also martyred for the faith. And even in the Old Testament, many who believed God’s Word were arrested and many were put to death for their faith. Today, it seems that arrests and death may be on their way.

Yet Jesus did not ask for His believers, for you or for me, to be taken out of the world. Rather He prayed that we would remain faithful to God’s Word, the Word He had taught His disciples while He was among them, and which the Church continues to preach and teach as it has been passed down by the apostles over the generations to you and to me. We are called, as it has been said, to be in the world, but not of the world.

Although it is only one statement made in our Old Testament text, we’ll see how Abram also had his troubles living as God had said in His Word. As Moses recorded, “At that time the Canaanites were in the land.” Amid all of God’s promises to Abram, He did not call him out of the world, but into enemy territory, because it would soon belong to him and his descendants.

Verse 1

“(T)he Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’”

With these words, God called Abram to task to the First Commandment. He told Abram to put Him first—before country, before family, and before self. And by God’s Spirit, Abram did. He left his home, the only country he had ever known, and went after God to a place that God had yet to show him.

Now this section is what the professors at Concordia Seminary would call descriptive rather than prescriptive. God has not called us, you or me, directly to leave our homes or our country. He did that to Abram as we can read in this text. Yet, like Abram, we are called to trust God more than our country. This is not to say we should ignore the laws of the land when they are in alignment with God’s Will. We should follow the speed limit, we should take oaths in court rooms, we should pay taxes. But should the government require that we do something against God’s Will as expressed through His Word, we have a higher authority, God Himself.

This is not to say that we should speak ill of our government or disobey them. In the midst of an emperor who was okay with the persecution and killing of Christians, St. Paul wrote Romans chapter thirteen, which is a chapter on obeying the government. Paul wrote there, “Let every person be subject to the governing

authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment... Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”

In addition, God called Abram to trust Him more than kindred. Once again, you have not been called directly by God to leave your families. But, once again, you have been commanded to love God more than your own family. In some respects, this is the same as before. Children, if your parents tell you to do something, you should do it. Unless they ask you to do something God has told you not to do. That does not include curfews or taking away your cell phones. If your parents tell you to be home at a certain time, you should be home at that time. And if your parents take away your cell phone, give it to them. But parents, do not forget that God has also commanded that you deal with your children justly, and that you do not drive them into despair, for that would be of no good for you.

Verse 2

God continued His Word to Abram saying, “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 him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

God had called Abram and his descendants to be a nation, the nation which would be Israel. As with Abram, his descendants would have trouble time and again with the Canaanites—intermarrying with them, being at war with them, and so forth. Yet God did not call Abram out of the world, but to be a great nation among the Canaanites. He would bless him and make his name great so that word about his God would get around. And it did.

Today, our nation does not have the promises that God gave to the nation of Israel. No country does. The Church, the believers found within our nation, however, does. But more than in the Old Testament, God’s promise crosses borders to extend throughout the globe. His nation of believers in the Church are all around the world.

And for the sake of Jesus, God continues to bless us, and to bless others through us. God first blessed us in sending Jesus to save us from our sin as the ultimate seed of Abram. God knew that we were sinners and that we would be unable to save ourselves, so He promised over and over in the Old Testament to send a Savior; and He fulfilled that promise in Jesus Christ, His Son. Jesus would die on the cross for the sins of all of humanity. Later in Genesis, it would say blatantly what it also said here in our text more subtly—that Abram was given faith by the Word of God, and that that faith was counted to him as righteousness because he believed and acted on it.

Today, it is the same for us. We acknowledge in the Apostles’ Creed that each of us “cannot by (our) own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, (our) Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called (each of us) by the Gospel, enlightened (us) with His gifts, sanctified and kept (us) in the true faith.” God called us to faith through His Word, and continues to keep us in His Word by the work of the Holy Spirit. And we received the Holy Spirit in the hearing of His Word, and the washing of rebirth in baptism which Jesus told Nicodemus about in our Gospel text. God works through us in bringing others to faith as He keeps us in faith through His Word and Sacraments and in having us respond to His Word and Sacraments in faithful actions.

Verse 3

Yet, as we are sent out again from His Word and Sacraments this morning, we remember that we have been called to be faithful in an unbelieving world. “At that time the Canaanites were in the land.” Today, we are also surrounded by enemies.

This is a warning. Not everyone on earth believes as we do, even here in central Illinois. Sometimes lack of faith is very blatant, as when others rebel against God’s Word in the papers or curse you for your belief. Other times, it is less apparent—and this is where we must be on our guard. Many of those who came after Abram were led away to other gods, who were not the true God. While not many today believe in some of the gods of the Old or New Testament, many have distorted views of God and His Word, which are dangerous to the faith God has given to you and to me.

For example, there is a movie out now based on a book I read a few years back called “The Shack.” Like anything else, we might read or watch this concept with Lutheran-tinted glasses, and only take out the good parts—and yes, there are some good things. But, here’s the warning—did you notice the parts that we *do not* agree with because they *do not* agree with Scripture? And not just for this one movie, but for all things you come across—can *you* recognize what follows God’s Word and what does not? We are called to be in the world and not of the world, which means that we need to be in God’s Word so that we—you and I both—can recognize and agree with what we believe, and also refute and refuse what we do not, lest we are subtly moved to fall away. Lest, as our youth catechism members know, meaning “so that not” or “so that it doesn’t happen”—in other words, so that we are not subtly moved to fall away.

Abram heard the Word of God and acted upon it, trusting what God had told him. Today, we do the same, trusting the Word of God and acting upon it—but how will we know the Word if we are not in it? How can you refute and refuse what you do not believe if you do not continue in coming to church regularly? Those surrounding us today may not be Canaanites, but like in Abram’s time, there are many ways we can be subtly or blatantly pulled from God’s Word to other gods. So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, trust God, as Abram did, hearing God’s Word and believing on it, so that it may be counted to you as righteousness, for the sake of your Savior from sin, Jesus Christ.
In Jesus’ Name. Amen.