

Sermon: God Will Come and Save  
Scripture: Genesis 12:1-4a; John 3:1-17  
March 5, 2023  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent  
Christian Ko Choi  
Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Springfield, Illinois

#### Genesis 12:1-4a

Today's first scripture reading comes from Genesis 12:1-4a. In Chapter 11, it lists the genealogy of Abram's lineage connecting him to Noah. Relationship between the father of our faith and story of Abraham opens with God coming to Abraham and giving him the calling of his life. Hear now the Word of our God.

*<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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."*

<sup>4</sup> So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him.

Amen.

#### John 3:1-17

Our Gospel reading comes from John 3:1-17. When we hear John 3, we can immediately recall the famous words that our Savior spoke of in John 3:16&17. Let us be reminded of the context of which that answer was given, in the conversation with Nicodemus, how Jesus comes to his rescue from his own perplexity. Hear now the Word of the Lord through John.

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> 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 unless God is with that person." <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." <sup>4</sup> 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?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. <sup>6</sup> What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' <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." <sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

<sup>11</sup> "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. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <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.

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only Son, so that everyone who believes in God may not perish but may have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup> “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.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: God Will Come and Save

*Text: Jesus answers, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” John 3:5*

Let us pray. Merciful God, who understands us completely and loving us still even knowing our shortcomings, we thank you this morning for never letting us go and always holding us in your mighty hands. As we turn to you during our Lenten journey, strengthen us and remind us that you are our God who continues to reach your hand out to us, both in our successes and trials. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Have you ever had one of those nights when you could not sleep for some reason? There are days when we are so excited about what is coming next that we can hardly sleep, even though we know that it is good for us to get some shuteye. I hope that Arthur slept well last night, but I have a lingering suspicion that his parents and grandparents might have lifted extra prayers of gratitude and joy as they looked forward to this morning to share their special moment and time with the church family.

Unfortunately, more often than not, we lose sleep over difficult circumstances of our lives which leads us to test and often asking God to intervene in our prayers. The times when things do not go according to plan and the predictability of life are disrupted; when one feels like they are going against the current of the world and questioning if they have the strength to endure and wondering if they should continue this huge effort to only make an inch of progress at a time; to be utterly alone, powerless, overwhelmed, and unprepared to face the situation; which leads us to be afraid and unsure how things are going to unfold... I have been there; you have been there; we all have been there and know what that feels like. Even our youth are not exempt from this, the times when we have exams or presentation that we are not ready for; for our young families, when we are holding our sick child in the middle of the night when nothing is helping; for our families with teenagers when you realize your little child has grown up and wanting to make their own decisions and choices – the ones that you know it will hurt them in the end; for our wise people, you face the physical limitations of humanity and try to make sense of meaning of life...

All of us have stories about the challenges that we face each day. The Bible does not hide from the realities of difficulties and gives us an insight of how God works in these very moments. Today's Scriptures are two of many examples of how these moments are meant to be an intersection of journey of life and journey of faith.

Nicodemus, the leader of the Jews, came to see Jesus in the middle of the night, pondering a question: How am I supposed to lead the Israelites in a way that would please God? Nicodemus confesses that Jesus is a teacher who has come from God and is with God, for "no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." Nicodemus heard and saw the miracles that Jesus have performed, and with all his knowledge of the prophets of old foretold as well as the power and authority that dwelt in Jesus, he couldn't understand. He saw Jesus and felt that Jesus was a new prophet or judge of Israel who have come to reveal the new message. Yet Jesus' teachings were new and incomprehensible for him. Internal question of his position as the position as the leader of the Jews and the life he has lived comes down to, 'what am I suppose to do when I recognize someone greater than myself?' I need answers and understanding.

It was the similar dilemma with Abram in Genesis. What does it mean that I have to leave my country, my people, my inheritance and wealth that my father owns- which will be mine one day? How am I supposed to live when I have to leave behind everything that I know and people I trust? To move beyond the comforts and safety of what I have and can control? Is this what God really wants from me?

These were the moments that God invited each of them for a conversation and relationship. In their darkness, questioning a deep difficult realities, God shows us again and again that God, in God's everlasting love, will come and save us. Like Jesus coming to Jerusalem during the Passover to be available for Nicodemus to ask these questions, like God coming to Abram in a voice to declare that God will show him and make him and bless him, if Abraham only trust in the promises of God words that God's marvelous light will shine in the darkness.

God will come and save, even in the darkest storms of life. The imagery that I have of God that comes closest is the rescue swimmers. In our mighty military, there is an elite special forces in U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Air Force who have a special responsibility of rescuing people, and they are called rescue swimmers. In the Air Force, they are more known as Pararescuemen or PJs. Whenever there are people who needed rescue, either on land, behind the enemy lines, or in the rough stormy sea, these women and men will get go and rescue people who are in need of help and rescue by jumping out of the safety of perfectly working helicopter to face the brutal waves that might kill a person during the jump or into the flying bullets that are coming their way. You know what their creed is?

*It is my duty as a Pararescueman to save life and to aid the injured. I will be prepared at all times to perform my assigned duties quickly and efficiently, placing these duties before personal desires and comforts. These things we (I) do, that others may live.*

If a PJ, another fellow human being, is prepared to save life and give aid to the injured so that others may live regardless what they might have to face, imagine how would our God,

the Creator, the Redeemer, our first and greatest love, would have prepared for those who love God?! When we are being rescued, we just need to let go of ourselves and have faith that the rescuer will take care of us. In our times of difficulty, we need to let go of our false notion that we are in control, that we have the answers, that we are alone in this endeavor to face the circumstances alone; for we know that God has walked with us, God has carried us in the darkest times when we did not have the strength, picked us up in the dark valleys and brought us back to the greener pastures with calm waters so that we may taste the peace of God in our lives.

This is how Abraham became the father of faith. This is why Nicodemus was the one who prepared the body of Jesus for the burial after the crucifixion. Just like how we can see the shining stars in the darkness of the night, they saw God's faithfulness and willingness to come and save them and leaned on God through their small yet firm faith. They have let go of their old ways and embraced the new life that God has prepared for their life's journey.

So friends, this morning, in the midst of our Lenten journey, let us do the same, as we are called to leave behind our old lives and embrace the new life that God has for us. This morning new mercies, new life are given to each and every one of us, and we have to hold on to it and dare to run faithfully for this day that God has given. This can be a scary and uncertain time, but we must hold on to our faith and trust in God's guidance and love. Let us be reminded this morning, through the baptism that we have witnessed, that let us be born once again in water and Spirit.

God's love and grace are always present in our lives, even in the darkest of times. Let us continue moving forward, asking God to restore us along the way and give us the strength to crawl if we have to, one inch at a time. In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit. Amen.