

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 2, 2017

Solemn Evensong

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 1: Exodus 3:16–4:12; Mark 8:31–9:1; John 10:1–16

The promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that their descendants would dwell in the land of Canaan¹, lived on after Jacob died in Egypt.² On Wednesday night gone, our reading from Genesis ended with Jacob's son Joseph requiring a promise by that his body would be embalmed and would be carried into the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when God visited them and fulfilled the covenant.³

Thursday night I was the reader for the first lesson from Exodus. I got to read the famous verse that sets the stage for the fulfillment of the promise, “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.”⁴ The oppression, the enslavement of the Hebrew people begins.⁵ The killing of the newborn male babies begins.⁶ Moses is born and hidden in the bulrushes; he’s saved by a daughter of Pharaoh.⁷ The

¹ Genesis 17:4–8.

² Genesis 49:33.

³ Genesis 50:25–26.

⁴ Exodus 1:8.

⁵ Exodus 1:9–14.

⁶ Exodus 1:15–22.

⁷ Exodus 2:1–10.

adult Moses kills an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew and has to flee for his life to the land of Midian. There he marries, and his wife bears a son.⁸

Meanwhile, “The people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.”⁹

Last night at Evening Prayer, the lesson from Exodus was God’s call to Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. That story begins with God speaking to Moses from inside a flame of fire in the midst of a bush that did not burn. It continues with Moses arguing with God about being God’s chosen instrument, God’s prophet. But the argument wasn’t over. The rest of it is our lesson tonight. God sticks by his choice; he does not take “no” for answer.

These themes get repeated in the annunciation to Mary in Luke’s gospel. Mary doesn’t really argue, but like Moses, she has questions. Gabriel settles things

⁸ Exodus 2:15b–22.

⁹ Exodus 23b–24.

with the proclamation, “For from God, nothing is impossible.”¹⁰ Or, “Nothing is impossible for God.”¹¹ These themes also echo through this morning’s gospel lesson, the Raising of Lazarus.¹²

Our second reading tonight from Mark is missing its context. Before Jesus begins to explain that he must suffer, be killed, and rise from the dead, Peter has just answered Jesus’ question, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter has responded, “You are the Christ.”¹³

The passage we heard ends with words about taking up the cross and being unashamed, concludes with Jesus saying, “Some of those who are standing here . . . will not taste death before they see the dominion of God fully come in power.”¹⁴ Mark continues with the revelation of Christ’s glory on the mountain of Transfiguration.¹⁵ The man who saw the burning bush

¹⁰ François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, trans. Christine Thomas, Hermeneia, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 43.

¹¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible 28 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 334.

¹² John 11:1–44.

¹³ Mark 8:29.

¹⁴ Mark 9:1. *Translation*: Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, Anchor Bible 27A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 615.

¹⁵ Mark 9:2–8.

was on that mountain, as was the man taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, Elijah. And still, Peter, James, and John did not understand the revelation of God in Christ.

We Christians confess faith and hope in the Christ we believe we know through Word, Sacrament, and his real presence in those he proclaimed are his brothers and sisters. We know that as we walk with Christ our pasts, with whatever joys, sorrows, sins, we have been carrying are shed as God brings us into new life.

“Alleluia” has not been said or sung—except by accident—in our worship since the beginning of Lent. But next Monday as we celebrate the Burial of the Dead for Linda Kay Bridges. It’s Monday in Holy Week. It’s always the “glad song” of Christians at the grave: Alleluia—the song of the life of the world to come.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.