

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish  
Newark, DE  
The Second Sunday in Lent – March 12, 2017/Year A  
Genesis 12:1-4a; 3:1-7; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17  
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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*May my words reveal the greater glory of God.*

*AMEN*

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As I navigate the lectionary readings each week in our three-year cycle, my prayer is to hopefully lead me to an image I can listen to God's invitation for my life, THEN for words around this invitation to share in sermonic form with you. Usually an image emerges, emphasis on the **usually**. This weeks the image emerged quickly – **kayaking down whitewater rapids!** Now I have not “checked out early” from my call to serve at St. Thomas's! I do admit my desire to more fully participate in this in my future, although sans the **whitewater rapids** part.

This image came by way of a story shared by a friend who is well skilled and does tackle some of the more formidable whitewater rivers in our land. He told me of a time when he meandered off line into a dangerous section of rocks and waterfalls. Catapulting over a formation of rocks, the kayak flipped over and he found himself struggling in **the hydraulic**.

In kayaker terms, this is the spinning, churning, and powerful currents found below and around the waterfall. It pulls and spins your body every which way, all the while powerfully pushing you below the surface. His first reaction was to try to swim **upward** to the surface, but with no success and growing fatigue. Then he remembered his training and how to escape the hydraulic – **to let go, relax, dive deeper and go with the flow of the current downstream away from the hydraulic**. After what seemed to be an eternity gauged by his burning lungs, he emerged about fifty yards downstream near the riverbank.

So, dare you ask, WHAT has this to do with Abram and Nicodemus? In the contrast of their stories, Abram **let go and let God** to lead his life forward. Nicodemus **tried to swim against the hydraulic of the Triune God**. The invitation I am reminded, again and again, is that to fully live in the power of God, I just need to **let go, let God, to be powered by powerlessness!**

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The faith of Abraham seems deceptively simplistic. Abraham does not seem to be a deeply thoughtful person or a debater of his generation on issues of faith. This seems to be confirmed by Abraham's response to God's call – “*Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you ... So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; ...*”

There is a destination, but **unknown**. A distance to travel, but **unknown**. There is packing to do and expenses to bear for the journey, but **unknown**. Abraham does know that ALL the comforts

of home and family are to be left behind. We know the importance of Abraham's response as it is the beginning of **the revelation of God to God's chosen people.**

Abraham did not know that this history was to unfold through his life – **he just went!** Even with his experience of the cultural deities of his day known only for their involvement with humans for use as pawns in otherworld contests, **he just went!** Scripture later reveals Abraham's moments of doubt in the echo of laughter at the angel's pronouncement of the birth of a son at the tender age of 100 years young. Then he later holds in pain-wracked confusion when told to sacrifice this self-same only son Isaac. Yet throughout his story, Abraham said YES to God. **Abraham just went, let go, let God, powered by powerlessness!**

Nicodemus is another story altogether. A tad more complex character, filled by self-knowledge and worldly importance, cautiously balancing faith with social/political correctness. You know Nicodemus as we often meet them in our days, the ones who SAY they believe, BUT ... Nicodemus is well known and respected in his day, one of the "in crowd." A teacher of the Mosaic traditions, and part of the ruling Sanhedrin. By using the definite article of "*a leader*" John is describing him as THE teacher of the Hebrew faith traditions. Therefore, one would expect him to know of God's ongoing presence in the world and with humanity, and the still expected returning David-like Messiah. He would have **known** all about the faith and history of Abraham, **BUT ...**

Nicodemus curiosity is piqued by this Jesus. There is something about him that seems to reveal a deeper presence and truth of God. Yet he cannot quite take the next step of faith that God invites him to take, so Nicodemus "*came to Jesus by night ...*" Nicodemus comes from **the darkness of the world** in which he lives, only to find his soul soaked by **the piercing, healing, and holy light** that is Jesus.

Although Nicodemus initiates the conversation, this is the last vestige of control he has with Jesus. Jesus begins teaching the TEACHER to what must happen through his life, and the life of the world, to be **in right sized relationship with God again.** New life happens by the spiritual awakening and birth that can only be occasioned through the power of this Triune God.

As Nicodemus questions reveal greater lack of understanding and faith, Jesus tells the story through the Law of Moses, the very law he teaches and supposedly lives. Jesus draws Nicodemus deeper and deeper into his heart of love and light, revealing this renewed love of God will be made manifest in Jesus being **lifted** upon the Cross for the sake of the world.

Using the story of Moses interceding and healing God's people with the bronze serpent, Jesus reveals the meaning of his death on the Cross as "*lifting up*" which is the very image of the enthronement of a king. Nicodemus would remember this when he gazes upon this same Jesus dying on the Cross for the life of the world.

Abraham said YES to God, and **Abraham just went!** Nicodemus came by night and struggles with **knowing versus believing** in faith of Jesus as the Messiah. **Let go, let God, powered by powerlessness!**

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Power, according to Jesus, is not something to be “grasped at.” I do not need to cling to my title, my uniform, my authorship, or whatever other trappings I use to make myself feel powerful and important. We all already have our power, the *dynamis*, within us and between us. It seems to me that the only people who can handle power well are those who do not need it too much, those who can equally let go and share in power. The people who can handle power are those who have made journeys through *powerlessness*.

The question becomes to *Whom* we are surrendering? The life of faith is learning how to rest in an Ultimate Love and to draw upon an Infinite Source. Only then will you be able to trust that you are being *held and guided*. When you doubt the possibility of guidance, you have stopped the flow and struggle against **the hydraulic of life**.

When we fully **let go and let God to be powered by powerlessness**, what first comes to your heart and soul must be a *yes* instead of a *no*, *trust* instead of *resistance*. When you can lead with *yes*, and allow yourself to see God in all moments, you will recognize that **nothing is ever wasted**.

On this day, we gather as this parish family of faith to give thanks and celebrate **175 years of ministry** in this community, to this university, and to our world. In the scope of our current day consumable and disposable world, where commodities are obsolete before they are even sold, this presence is a remarkable statement of faith, resilience, and **letting go and letting God to be powered by powerlessness**. We also know of times in our history when WE decided “**we got this one, God**” and the subsequent time of living under **the hydraulic of life** as result of this choice.

It is my prayer for you, this day and onward, that you rejoice in the Love created community you are now, and are fully capable of becoming even more of in your days ahead. “**Nourished at Christ’s table, we are God’s love ...**” our mission proclaims. We do this out of the best of ourselves when we **let go and let God, to be powered by powerlessness**.

*AMEN*