

“An Open Invitation,”

John 3:14-17

Lent Sunday 2-A, March 16, 2014

The most traveled road in the history of this world is a road that you and I are being invited to travel on once again throughout this holy season of Lent. I am speaking about the **“via dolorosa;” a Latin phrase which means the “Way of Sorrows.”** This is that lonely road that Jesus walked during the last hours of his life on that first Good Friday prior to **his crucifixion.**

It is that road upon which our Savior was commanded to carry his cross **all the way from the judgment hall of Pontius Pilate to Golgotha;** an Aramaic word meaning **“skull,”** because the hill upon which Jesus was crucified was shaped like that of a **human skull,** transliterated into the Latin **“CALVARIA,”** from which derive our English word **“Calvary,”** or **“Mount Calvary.”**

Armed with nothing more than his earnest passion to win your heart and mine, our Savior came into this world to reconcile us to his Heavenly Father **by redeeming us** from sin, death and the power of the evil one; by his purchasing for us the forgiveness of our sins! Yes, he came to fill us with the **hope of life everlasting—** and his **ultimate quest** has **always** been to **one day take us to live with him in his true home with our father in heaven.**

St. Luke tells us that Jesus was 30 years old (Luke 3:23), when he accepted his Heavenly Father’s invitation to now leave his private life behind him there in that little town of Nazareth where he grew up. Jesus did so because it was now time for him to begin his public ministry. That day eventually did come when he had to say **“good-bye” to Mary his Mother; perhaps with a kiss.** Maybe there was even one last meal that he celebrated together with her and other family members before he said farewell.

The appointed Scripture lessons in this worship service this morning all speak to us about an invitation that God extends to us also; an open invitation because it actually being extended to every one of us and to all people everywhere, who have ever lived in any time or place. **And it’s an invitation that holds good for every one of us until the day we die, unless Christ comes again for his church in glory on a day before die.**

How do I know that it is an **OPEN INVITATION?** I can answer that question with one word; with only one word taken from our Gospel lesson this morning, which includes the best known Bible verse throughout the world. **The word that I am talking about is that little word “whoever;” or “whosever”** as it appears for us in the King James Version of the Bible. **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life!” (John 3:16)**

The Old Testament lesson this morning reminds us that God’s open invitation for all people everywhere to become the personal recipients of his divine salvation—finds its origin way back in the pages of the Old Testament, in the first book of the Bible, that we call Genesis. **In the words of our Old Testament lesson today, we are witnesses to the Patriarch Abraham being given an invitation by the Lord God too.**

God’s invitation to Abraham was not so much an invitation **TO COME,** as it was an invitation **FOR HIM “TO GO.”** And God really doesn’t give Abraham any details as to where he is now asking him to go. The Biblical text simply and mysteriously says **“to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).** This may sound like a lot

to ask of a person who is 75 years old. And there is a threefold emphasis connected with God's invitation to Abraham that indicates to us just how strongly God was calling upon Abraham **to make a clean break with past.** ***"Go from your country, and your kindred, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And 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!" (Genesis 12:1-3)***

Can't we see that the great Biblical truth being taught to us in John 3:16 in our gospel lesson today, is the same biblical truth being expressed here? God's open invitation to salvation that is now coming to everyone in the Person and work of Jesus Christ is **already prophesied for us here** in the first book of the Bible. ***"In you (Abraham) all the families of the earth shall be blessed!" (Genesis 12:3)***

(1) **God so loved the world, that he promised the Patriarch Abraham that one day all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his future offspring.** ("All the families of the earth," and the "world" are synonymous.)

(2) **God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him, should not perish but have eternal life!"** ("All the families of the earth," and the "world" are synonymous.)

Yes, God was out to bless Abraham, but please note that Abraham was not was not going to become the **sole recipient,** nor the **only repository,** for God's abundant grace and mercy. **God promises Abraham that the whole world would one day be blessed through the blessing God was now conferring upon him!**

This far reaching nature of God's choosing Abraham to go in faith and to become a blessing to all the families of this earth becomes all the more clear to us when God renews that promise to Abraham in chapter 15.

There God tells Abraham: ***"Go out and look up into the evening sky,"*** God tells Abraham. ***"Count the stars that are up there, if you are able! That's how many spiritual children God is going to bless you with one day, my dear friend!"***

"Count the stars that are up there Abraham, if you are able!"

God certainly has a lot of people in mind here. And there was no way that Abraham could possibly have known back then, just how many stars are out there in what seems to be the ever-expanding universe all around us, just as we would have no real way of knowing either how many stars are actually out there in the wild blue yonder, except for the fact that **God has now blessed astronomers at NASA with those marvelous gifts like the two space probes: Voyager I and II, and with the Hubble Telescope and the International Space Station, constantly sending back to earth pictures of what is really out there!**

I read this past week, that scientists are pretty well certain now that there are probably some **seventy-sextillion stars out there in the universe;** including stars in all those other galaxies and meta-galaxies out there beyond our own Milky Way! How do you write seventy-sextillion in numerals? Do you know? Well, I can tell you how. Write down the number 7, and then write down, 22 zero's behind that number seven, and that number is now the number seventy-sextillion.

The all important message that St. Paul wants to share with us in our Epistle lesson today is found in verse of 3 of Romans chapter 4: *“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3)*

Friends, the God of the Bible is a God who makes great promises to his people. We heard this already last Sunday, in the Genesis account, depicting the fall of mankind into sin—that **God not only pronounced judgment upon our first parents because of their disobedience, he furthermore promised to send One into the world who would destroy the power of the old evil foe. Of the promised Messiah the LORD God says to Satan: *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel!” (Genesis 3:14-15)***

Here also is a God who comes to Noah, after purging the wickedness of the world with a cleansing, worldwide flood: *“Never again; I promise! Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”*

And God promised, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations. I have set my rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth!” (Genesis 9:11-13)

AND IN OUR GOSPEL LESSON JESUS MAKES ANOTHER IMPORTANT PROMISE TO NICODEMUS. *“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that all who believe on him may have eternal life!”* Here Jesus predicts his own death and resurrection (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14-15)

The LORD God who leads Abraham out of his tent one night under a sky full of stars, saying: *“So shall your offspring be!” (Genesis 15:5)*, is a God who not only makes promises but keeps the promise that he does make to his people. And later when God renews the promise that he had made with Abraham with Abraham’s grandson Jacob, the prediction there is even more interesting. God tells Jacob that his offspring will be as numerous as the sands on the seashore! (Genesis 32:12).

And Jacob didn’t believe for a moment that he was worthy of such a forgiving grace, the grace of God that was now being heaped out upon him in his life! He openly confesses to the LORD God: *“I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children!”* But YOU SAID TO ME: *‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered!’” (Genesis 32:12)*

God did do Jacob good and restored his broken relationship to his twin brother Esau and made both of them whole in their relationship with one another again; which is primarily what the word salvation means: **“To be made whole in your relationship with God!”**

Friends, I want to close alluding to something that happened to Jesus’ disciples one night out there in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, when a tremendous storm came upon those waters. St. Mark tells us: *“A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped!” (Mark 4:37).*

Where was Jesus? He was not at the mask of that boat. He was not grapping onto the edge of that boat or hanging on for dear life! Where was Jesus? The disciples turned and looked, and there all curled up in the

stern of the boat, Jesus is sleeping on a cushion! This is when St. Mark also tells us that Jesus *“got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves: ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm”* (v. 39).

By the power of God at work in Jesus Christ his Son the raging waters had now become a stilled sea, instantly. The water was immediately calm without a ripple; smooth as a sheet of glass!

One of the men who witnessed that great event that day said something that is worth our hearing as we make our way down the *“via dolorosa”* once again this Lenten season. ***“What kind of a Man is this, that even the wind and the waves obey him?” (Mark 4:41)***

How will you respond to God’s open invitation to you again this day?

The wind and the waves obey him, because even they were able to hear his voice and were subject to his command: *“Peace be still!” (Mark 4:39)*

The waves were his subjects. The winds were his servants. The wind and the waves heard him and responded gladly to his voice with obedience and faith. If these inanimate objects heard and responded to the voice of the only-begotten Son of God, who are we to do anything less?

Why not respond in faith to God’s open invitation again today?

After all John gives us some added encouragement! **[Max Lucado’s book: JOHN 3:16]**

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him!” (John 3:17) Amen