

Sermon for March 12, 2017

2nd Sunday in Lent

Pastor Alan Bray

Grace and peace to each of you in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen

Quite a few years ago, I had a memorable conversation with a friend of mine. I hadn't had the opportunity to talk with this friend for quite some time. She had not had an easy life. Problems with health. Problems with relationships. Problems with personal issues. Problems with faith. But this friend was a fighter...though her scars were many, her determination was unrelenting.

I remember this conversation as though it were yesterday. Without any beating around the bush, she laid her cards on the table. "It's been tough lately, Alan...awfully tough. I'm pretty beat up. I'm tired. I need something from you. I need some reassurance from you. I need you to tell me straight and honest...that whatever happens to me, everything is going to be OK. I need to hear it from you...I need to hear that you believe that whatever happens to me...and to you...that everything is going to be OK. Tell me, Alan. Is everything going to be OK?"

It's strange, but as I recall her words, that question still haunts me today. You can rephrase it any way you like, but at its core, it's the question we all ask. Maybe it's the question each of us asks every day of our lives.

I suspect that Abram struggled with that question thousands of years ago. Genesis reminds us that "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.'"

Now if I'd been Abram, my first thought would probably have been: "What?! Are you kidding me? Are you out of your everlasting mind, God? At my age, leave everything that's familiar and comfortable...and go to some strange, unknown land? Excuse my impertinence, but...are you nuts?" (Those would have been my words, but in essence I would have been asking, "Will everything be OK, Lord?")

Now as we know from this morning's text, God had not finished speaking to Abram. God continued with a promise: "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 the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

"So Abram went, as the LORD had told him." There was no hesitation at all...Abram simply went. Why? Abram believed what he had been told. For the LORD not only told Abram to

“GO!”, but the LORD had also told Abram that “everything would be OK! No matter what happens (and we all know that a lot did happen to Abraham)...no matter what happens, “Everything will be OK.” And Abram believed.

Today we Christians call Abraham the “Father of Faith.” In fact, so do Jews and Muslims. We all look back to Abraham as an example of what it means to trust God...to take God at God’s word...to believe that everything will be OK.

But we Christians don’t stop with Abraham. For while the covenant began with him, we believe that the new covenant was established almost two thousand years later in Jesus the Christ...God’s only Son, our Lord and Savior.

As this morning’s reading from the Gospel of John records: “God so loved the world that God gave God’s only son, so that everyone who believes in Jesus may not perish but may have eternal life. 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...or if I might paraphrase...so that the world might know that everything will be OK.

Maybe, that’s what Nicodemus really wanted to know as well. Maybe that’s what drove him to visit Jesus in the dead of night. Maybe when he asked Jesus, “How can these things be?”...he simply wanted assurance that everything would indeed be OK.

Now I don’t mean to be simplistic about all of this, but when my friend asked me years ago to reassure her that “No matter what happens, everything will be OK!”, I did exactly that on the basis of what I know and believe about Jesus. As it was back then and as it is today, I cling to the belief that the cross and the empty tomb are signs of God’s love...signs of Jesus’ victory over the power of sin, the power of death and the power of the evil one...signs for me that everything will be OK. I believe this to be the absolute truth.

Even in the midst of war, pestilence and hunger.

Even in the midst of political deceit, racial violence, environmental betrayal and economic inequity.

Even in the midst of my own sin, greed and perversity.

I believe that everything will be OK...because of Jesus.

Two days ago, I took Holy Communion to Ruth Larson in the Angel Wing of the Benedictine Living Community. Now most of you know that Ruth Larson has been among us for a long, long time. In fact, she turned 104 a week ago yesterday. Ruth is as gracious, elegant and thoughtful a woman as you’d ever care to meet.

And even though parts of her mind have diminished significantly in these past few years, there remains the wit and wisdom of a sage and a saint.

When I found her in the dayroom two days ago and asked her if she'd like to receive the Lord's Supper, her response was an excited, "Oh, yes!!!" And as we chatted, she waxed poetic in her recollection of days gone by. She didn't gloss over the hard times that she, her family and her church had experienced, but she couched it all in gratitude to God for a rich and memorable life.

"I don't know where the time has gone," she said, "but in sum, life's been good and I am very, very content. I don't know how much longer I've got, but it will be good. I'm in good hands."

Oh yes, dear friends, in Christ Jesus our Lord, everything is going to be OK!

Amen