

Lenten Devotional March 20, 2021

Scripture

Romans 9:1-18

1 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit— 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 5 to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. 6 It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, 7 and not all of Abraham’s children are his true descendants; but “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you.” 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants. 9 For this is what the promise said, “About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” 10 Nor is that all; something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac. 11 Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God’s purpose of election might continue, 12 not by works but by his call) she was told, “The elder shall serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.” 14 What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. 17 For the scripture says to Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18 So then he has mercy on whomsoever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomsoever he chooses.

Devotional

The Rev. Brian Wallace '06

“There are clubs you can’t belong to, neighborhoods you can’t live in, schools you can’t get into, but the roads are always open.” This marketing slogan, from Nike, has been a source of inspiration for runners such as me for many years.

As I reflect on our passage from Romans 9, I am reminded of this slogan. After all, Paul argues that to be a child of God has nothing to do with who you are, where you come from, what you look like, how much money you have, who your parents are, etc. “This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise who are counted as descendants” (v. 8). To be a child of God is to trust in the promise.

In short, the promise—proclaimed as the coming reign of God by Jesus, the Messiah—is one that is wide open. Wide open to everyone, no exceptions. In this Lenten season we prepare to celebrate the week that sealed this centuries-old, wide-open promise to everyone, no matter what their past or future promise. We prepare to celebrate the week when God won final victory over the power of sin and death on that glorious morning.

Prayer

Gracious God, help us, your people, to be those who proclaim your wide-open promise. May we see past the barriers and blind spots that keep us from being your faithful ambassadors to those you love. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.