

These readings and the psalm help us understand the posture our ancestors took in relation to God and serve to remind us that we need to take action in our lives.

1<sup>st</sup> reading – God has a mission for all of us and we don't know what it entails or where it will lead. Like Abraham we are called to place our trust in the Lord. This is the covenant that God established with Abraham and which has been handed down from generation to generation to us – **WE ARE GOD'S PEOPLE, NOT BY OUR CHOOSING, BUT BY HIS!** God offered us salvation through Jesus Christ. He invited everyone, not just those of us here in the church this evening. Those who have responded can truly be called God's people; but in reality everyone has been called. In addition, it's part of our calling to pass on the good news that there is hope, and that we know this from our own experience. Speaking from our own experience enables people to believe in us – that we are speaking from our experience, not just from what we have heard.

Psalm - Response is "Lord, let your mercy be upon us as we place our trust in You." Our soul waits for the Lord who is our help and our shield. May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us who have put our hope in you. Do we mean that? If we mean what we say then we are really putting our worries in the hands of the Lord. But that means we have to let go of them! We place our trust in You! God, you who are greater than we are or ever will be. If we can't turn our worries over to God who better is there? Ourselves? Not hardly!

2<sup>nd</sup> reading – God saves us. Not by what we do or have done, but by His grace acting unilaterally (meaning that He took the first step and didn't wait for us!) Some of our Christian brothers and sisters would say that they have been saved. I would like to refine that statement to say that God continues to SAVE US. This is an ongoing process. It isn't a one time deal. Of course we could say that we accepted God's generous offer at Baptism and that we are on board with God, and we have been ever since. In reality, ever since the Resurrection we have been saved by Christ. It's another example of God reaching out to us, of God initiating the offer of His love for us.

The trouble I have with saying that we have been saved is that we fall down and need to get back up again. We also go through periods of time, sometimes lasting years, where we are indifferent to God. Are we still saved? Yes, the offer still stands, Jesus still died on the cross and redeemed us, but we could say that we are not thinking about that right now. We have other stuff we have to do. In those cases, even though we may have been saved, we are not accepting God's generous offer. We have put God on hold.

I think it's a better question to ask if we are living the Gospel. When we live our lives in harmony with the Gospel we are responding to God in the best way possible. If we accept the covenant of God, and accept that he is our God and that we are His people, we can say that we are building the Kingdom of God here on earth. The trouble is that as easy as that sounds we often really try to keep God at arm's length. We may unintentionally push God away, or at least we don't

reach out and grab the hand He extends to us. We are like children who, at times, insist on doing “it”, whatever it may be, by themselves.

Have we accepted God’s mercy just the one time or have we made it a part of our life? Do we treat one another as we would like to be treated. Do we treat one another as daughters and sons of the same Father, God? The question is always whether we accept God’s invitation. Do we accept just once, say thank you, and go on about life never giving it another thought? That isn’t really living the Gospel is it? If we accept God’s grace, His love, His mercy, and we keep accepting it and passing it on to others, then yes we are living the Gospel. Then, rather than saying we have earned a place in heaven we can say that we accepted God’s generous act of love, we accept His mercy and forgiveness, and we have lived lives of thanksgiving sharing the love God has shown us, by loving one another. We have lived lives informed by the Gospel.

God saved us and we celebrate and rejoice. That’s the beauty of the Eucharist. We really do give thanks that God has saved us. We share that saving act even though we don’t really understand how that bread and wine have become the Body and Blood of Jesus. Although we don’t understand, we believe; and we say “AMEN” when the priest or minister of Holy Communion holds the host before and says, “the Body of Christ” and holds the chalice up to us and says “the Blood of Christ”. Our AMEN means that we believe, that we accept the grace God offers to us, and not only for ourselves, but we rejoice and give thanks that God has

extended His mercy to our friends and neighbors – the other members of this community of faith and the larger community of faith that is the Church.

That's one of the reasons Reconciliation is so important, because (1) we have to be ready, and (2) we constantly fall down and need His help to get back up.

Gospel - Do not be afraid!! How many times do we have to hear that before we take it to heart?

For me the key phrase of the gospel reading is when Jesus says to the disciples to "get up and do not be afraid." Of what were they afraid? It could have been a lot of things. The voice from above was intimidating. When they heard the voice speak to them they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. Remember also that what the disciples were going through was very much strange to them. Jesus challenged everything they stood for and had lived by during their lives. Some, especially the more obviously alienated like Matthew the tax collector, probably were concerned that the people would turn on them. I suspect Matthew lived in fear. The others were trying to reconcile the teachings of Jesus with what they had been taught. In the preceding section of the Gospel of Matthew, at the end of chapter 16, Jesus had made His first prediction of the Passion telling them that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer greatly and be killed and on the third day be raised. Peter had protested vehemently to Jesus about this prediction of the Passion. So, after Jesus explained what was going to be necessary to be a disciple their fears applied not only to what would happen to Jesus, but to themselves.

They had to wrestle with whether it was OK to be a follower of Jesus if one wanted to be a faithful Jew? The Transfiguration of Jesus and the vision of Him in glory speaking with Moses and Elijah addressed that concern. Here, during this vision, they were able to see Jesus in the presence of Moses and Elijah and see the unity of their Jewish heritage and being disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. The glory of the Lord “bathed in light, His face shining like the sun,” gave them assurance that what they were doing was right. And even though the voice from above intimidated them and they fell down, now it was Jesus’ turn to reassure them and to give them confidence that they were doing the right thing.

Like the disciples we can put together all of what we heard here today. We can recall that we are part of the Covenant that God first made with Abraham - that we are His people. And then we can put aside our fears, confident that Jesus is God and that by us following Him we are doing the right thing. Finally we can remember that God has saved us and all we have to do is turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel, the words we heard on Ash Wednesday when ashes were applied to our foreheads. Of course it would help if we knew what was written in the Gospel so that we can really do what we say we’re doing. Let that be part of our Lenten prayer to read some scripture very day.