

West Branch Community of Christ

Participant Companion Guide – Lectionary Lessons Pilot

March 1, 2015

Second Sunday in Lent **WORLD HUNGER EMPHASIS**

Theme: **BE A COVENANT PEOPLE**

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

17When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” 3Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,

4“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

15God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Central Ideas:

- ***God desires to be in relationship with humankind, and asks for our loyalty, trust, and service in response.***
- ***Abraham, known for his faithful trust, still had times of doubt. So do we.***
- ***Our baptismal covenant is a serious, binding vow to be one of God’s people.***
- ***Through the sacrament of Communion our sacred covenant is renewed and we are made spiritually whole.***
- ***Covenant calls us to respond in mission.***

Exploring the Scripture

The Bible describes God’s relationship with humankind as a covenant initiated by God. A covenant was more than a promise, resolve, or commitment. In ancient times, it was a binding vow of great seriousness, beyond law, often between unequal partners. The more powerful member promised protection, safety, and blessing. The weaker member promised loyalty, faithfulness, and obedience.

In Genesis, God the Creator walked with Adam and Eve as with equals; but sin destroyed the relationship of mutuality. Separation from God climaxed when God used a flood to destroy the creation once deemed very good. God unleashed the waters of chaos that were tamed during creation. Only Noah and those under Noah’s protection survived. God promised never to destroy the world by flood, but God was also realistic (Genesis 6:13–18). The temptation to do so is great. The rainbow became a sign of the first covenant: God’s binding promise to preserve life (Genesis 9:14–17).

God called Abram to leave Ur and go to a new land. God promised “in you all families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). Abram obeyed, moving his family into Canaan. After Abram turned from war and received the blessing of Melchisedek, God expanded his promise: (1) his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, and (2) Abram and his children would occupy Canaan. In a dream, Abram saw God passing between pieces of animals that Abram had slaughtered and divided in two (Genesis 15:1–18). In Abram’s culture it symbolized the seriousness of the covenant. It meant, “Kill me and divide my body, like these animals, if I break this solemn vow.”

But years passed, and Abram aged. The promised heir had not been born. Abram’s trust in God wavered in doubt. Abram took matters into his own hands. He established his steward as his heir, but God said no. Abram sired a son by his wife’s maid, Hagar, but God said this was not the promised child. Finally, when Abram was 99 years old, God affirmed for the third time Abram would be the father of a multitude of nations.

As a sign, God changed Abram’s name, which meant “Exalted Father,” to Abraham, “Father of a Multitude.” God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants, and “I will be their God” (Genesis 17:8). From this time forward, the covenant between God and humankind echoed the simplicity of the Abrahamic covenant: “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

Isaac (Genesis 17:19, 21), Moses (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:9, 12), David (2 Samuel 23:5), Isaiah (Isaiah 55:3, 61:8), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 11:4, 30:22), and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 16:59–63) affirm the everlasting covenant with God. The followers of Jesus inherit that covenant (Acts 3:25) and in baptism commit their lives to Christ as the “new covenant” (Hebrews 8:13, 12:24).

God-in-Christ lives in us, an echo of God’s promise to be our God and dwell among us, if we will be God’s people. When we partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper each month, we are also reminded of God’s covenant with us through Jesus. We are made new in our covenantal relationship with God. Our sins are forgiven, and our spiritual lives are made whole once again.

When we understand and accept God’s love for us, we respond by loving others. We extend the idea of covenant into our relationships. We respond in service to those around us. Jesus Christ understood his mission as an unbreakable covenant to proclaim, model, teach, and live out “good news to the poor...release to the captives...sight to the blind...to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18–20). That mission is our mission, a call to commit our lives to serving others in love and joy, as part of our covenant with God.