

I Will, With God's Help

Lent is commonly understood by many as a season of sacrifice, a time when we give up this or that. But while we might make external sacrifices, these actions are simply meant to be outward signs of internal transformation. Sunday we will hear a piece of the story of Abraham, a man of faith, who accepts the call to leave his home and travel to a new land to found a nation. God's covenant with Abraham is about the inward transformation of a man and woman. It is a transformation that not only shows nothing is impossible with God, but it sweeps generations of peoples up in God's promises.

This story affirms that God is interested in all aspects of our individual lives—even the mundane and most intimate—are sites of God's interaction with humanity. The transformation of Abram and Sarah is symbolized by their names. Their new names are an outward sign that they have undergone a rite of passage. That they have made a decision to believe in God's promise, a promise that this old man and barren woman would bear a child and become the parents of a multitude of nations. Sarah actually laughed out loud at the prospect it seemed so absurd, but in the end allowed God to offer her a new beginning. So the season of Lent in this light is less about sacrifice and more about transformation. The season of Lent invites new actions or new decisions that usher in an internal change. It is a time to explore what it truly means to be in covenant with God—as well as how we live this covenantal relationship with God through our community of faith.

Covenantal relationship says that when we decide that in all things we are God's person, we understand that our life is then profoundly linked with God's will. Life holds many challenges for all of us, how we respond to these challenges is part and parcel of the nature of our relationship with God. That is why in our Baptismal vows some of our responses to those hard pledges about how we will now live our lives in response to God's love are "I will, with God's help." We acknowledge we need God when we are not being our best selves. God created the world and loves everything that is in it. God's purpose in sending the Christ is to redeem and reconcile the whole world to God once and for all. When we decide that above all else we are first and foremost God's people, in Covenantal relationship with God, we participate in God reconciling and redeeming purposes. Being God's person is not about getting it "all perfect" or always knowing the answer. It is simply about deciding, not just once, but possibly a thousand times over before our lives are through, that we belong to God. And then, because we *have* decided to belong to God, God's merciful will must always be married to our own in all that we do. And as a result we *will be asked* to change our hearts and minds to more closely mirror God's love. Even, if not especially around difficult decisions of justice and mercy for others in the human family, especially those for whom the world has not been kind. And as the devil is in the details, what are those daily habits into which we have fallen that fail to honor God? Can you name the damaging habits that happen in families, churches, and workplaces that fail to mirror the grace of God? It is no small thing to remember we are God's person. ■ This is where having a covenant becomes our pledge to place God's will at the center of who we are as individual persons and as the gathered community of faith. And in light of having given ourselves to God, we have the courage to face destructive behaviors and make things right in the relationships or situation in which we have caused unnecessary pain. God's love for us and for those we've hurt will hold us in relationship in such times. Because of this we can be brave and love as Jesus taught us. Lent offers us a sweet invitation to examine our lives and reorder our relationships and decide once again that we belong to God and that we will shape and mold our hearts and actions to God's purposes. Covenant is an invitation to transformation. It is our chance to stand with Abraham, Sarah, Noah, Moses, Peter, Mary mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene and all the faithful and say, I am God's person and we are God's people! Together, with our Covenanting God, we can do marvelous things.

Happy Lent, Stephanie+