

Genesis 15:1-12 Lent 2 C 2025
 I Invite you to the Observance of a Holy Lent
 Trinity, Farmington Hills
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May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us. Be with us this day and remain with us always. Amen. Good Morning.

Have you ever wondered how some things can take so very long to change, while others seem to transform in a moment? Have you noticed how we can fixate upon some events and other happenings, arise into the collective conscience and then after a few news cycles fall away? Have you noticed how a lie can be told and then if not disputed and knocked down forcefully, this untruth can gradually be accepted as a substantive perception of reality? Have you noticed, if you have power and wealth our world seems to give you more airtime and worth? Where is God's promise in all of this?

This reminds me of
 God and Abraham.
 God calls Abraham,
 promises him the world,
 or if not the world, then descendants
 as numerous as the stars and land—
 a promised land.
 Yet that was chapters ago—
 and what we hear today Abraham
 is still tapping his foot
 waiting for God's promise to be a reality.
 Abraham is at this point in time
 not particularly overwhelmed with God's timeliness.

"Ahhhh—Gracious God
 I did what you asked—
 packed up my people—
 left my home—
 had quite the time convincing my wife—
 but here we are.
 Years later—
 I'm still without one heir much less countless ones.

God replies,
 "I brought you out of the Chaldeans
 —I am the Lord."
 That's nice for you O Lord—
 but seriously how am I to know that this will be?"

Twenty-four years later—
 twenty-four years later—
 things began to look up.
 After things looked really bad.
 Sarah at 90 is pregnant and glowing....

What do I take from this snippet of scripture, in this time of lent, in this time of a veritable cyclone of political upheaval, backlash, and diplomatic implosions. What stands out to me, having just returned from our Diocese's second annual Civil rights Pilgrimage are the unrelenting ramifications and legacy of the human trafficking and enslavement of 22 million people kidnapped from Africa, brought to our country and held in generational bondage for 250 years and then denied basic civil rights for another 150 years. The long-haul.

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"I invite you in the name of Christ, to the observance of a Holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word," (*Book of Common Prayer*, 1979 p 265).

I offered these words some 10 days ago on Ash Wednesday.

So often in Lent we focus on our individual sins, our personal faults and failings. To be fair, there is much in my life with which I must wrestle. I have besetting sins, that dog me every day. And yet, sin is not just personal. It is corporate, communal and structural. In order to observe a Holy Lent, we need to reckon with both forms of sin. We are called to reckon with both forms of sin for the long haul.

I've now made this Civil Rights Pilgrimage three times. And each time a new understanding has surfaced in my brain. A new awareness, that I'm ashamed to not have fully understood before. This trip's realization was that the United States of America became so very rich, some dominant, because democracy is amazing, people of the US work hard and for 250 years our country did not pay a large percentage of the workforce. Between 1800 to 1850 the labor force was 1.9 million people. Of that group a half of million people were enslaved and not paid. (Statista Research 1975).

Slavery benefitted the owners of cotton plantations in Alabama and clothing factories in New York city. The economics of slavery permeated this country. I knew this, but this year I finally began to understand this deep in my soul. Sin is personal, sin is communal, sin is here and now, sin is historic, sin is sin and it eats at our souls, it's in the marrow of our bones.

I used to find myself arguing adamantly against the notion of original sin. How could a baby have sin? A baby who is made so clearly in God's image and likeness? They can't, they don't.

But the work of German theologian Dorethe Soelle, gave me a different understanding of original sin. Rather than seeing it as an anachronistic view that a little baby has sin, because scripture tells us that Adam and Eve sinned, Soelle describe original sin in a different way.

Soelle was a child in Nazi Germany. She wasn't even a teenager when WWII ended. Yet as an adult when she went to such countries as the Netherlands she encountered hostility from Dutch people when they realized she was German. They held resentment toward her, because of the German occupation during the war.

Soelle was taken aback. She hadn't done anything. She was a child. She had nothing to do with the Nazi policies. But then it came to her, that through no fault of her own she grew up in that country, in that culture, that allowed a government to carry out heinous policies. She lived in the midst of a social, structural sin. A sin that killed people, oppressed and enslaved people.

Then she saw it was understandable that these Dutch people who suffered from the actions of her elders would harbor deep abiding resentment, loss and pain. It was then that Soelle began to construct a different understanding of social, communal or original sin. She was touched by it, because she lived in that culture.

The only way to move beyond it was to actively name what happened, repent of that historic evil, make reparations as an individual and as a collective group.

This then is what I believe part of our long haul work is in these United States in regards to the historic sin of kidnapping, trafficking and enslaving 22 million people and their ancestors for 250 years in our country.

It is a sin that is not on any one individual of us in this country. But if we are ever to reckon with it and its legacy than each and every one of us must begin to do the work of listening and learning and rectifying the evils of enslaving people in our country.

This lent, in our observance of a Holy Lent, like Abraham and Sarah, I invite us into this work for the long haul.

In lent, in our observance of a Holy lent we are called to reckon with our past, name our current realities, so that we may live into the blessed hope of our future, where as the Apostle Paul says to the people of Galatia...

*That there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, but rather we are all one in Christ Jesus.
Amen.*