

COME TO JESUS
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Second Sunday in Lent
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Psalm 27

Love is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?

Genesis 15:1-18

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

Luke 13:31-35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.' He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.'

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Sometimes the appointed lessons for a given Sunday stump me. Today's lessons totally stumped me.

In the Old Testament lesson God says to a despondent Abraham, despairing of his life and future, "Get up. Go bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

To which we might say: *Why the age specifications for the beasts but not the birds.* My guess is that trying to identify and capture a three-year old turtledove and pigeon in the wild would have driven Abraham around the bend. *You want a three-year old pigeon, GET IT YOURSELF!*

Abraham gathered the animals and inexplicably killed them. Even more inexplicably, he surgically sawed the four-footed animals into symmetrical halves but left the dead birds intact. The lesson continues.

Vultures circled overhead and dove down on the carcasses. But Abraham drove them away and away and away until he was exhausted. He collapsed on the ground and into a deep sleep.

No surprise there. Abraham was no spring chicken at that point in his life. The frantic waving of his arms had worn him out.

A heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon—each slaughtered by the founder of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. And then vultures circled overhead.

Now that could "preach," I suppose, but it would actually make a better Monty Python skit.

So I pushed that lesson aside and looked at the gospel lesson for today. The lesson was not much better. In it Jesus blows his top and refers to King Herod as a wily fox and then refers to himself as a mother hen desperately trying to gather her terrified brood under her wings.

Wily fox. Frantic hen. That could "preach," too, I suppose, but it's actually better material for the GOP debates.

So here's what we have: a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove, a pigeon, vultures, a fox

and a hen. Go figure.

These lessons truly bewildered me. So all week I sliced and diced them to death and sure enough vultures descended. I waved them off until I fell into a homiletical nightmare like Father Abraham.

And then a light appeared.

Love is my light and my salvation,
whom shall I fear?
Love is the strength of my life,
Of whom shall I be afraid?
When fears assail me, rising up to accuse me,
Each one in turn shall be seen in Love's light.
Though a multitude of demons rise up within me,
my heart shall not fear.
Though doubts and guilt do battle,
yet shall I remain confident.

And with that, I awakened from my nightmare. I saw a light.

As it turns out, the Psalm for today is a link to each of the lessons. For, you see, Abraham and Jesus had reasons to doubt and to be afraid. Abraham was about to die with his dreams unfulfilled and Jesus was about to be killed by Herod.

Love is my light and my salvation,
whom shall I fear?
Love is the strength of my life,
Of whom shall I be afraid?

And that prompted me to flip through the hymnal looking for a hymn of reassurance against our fears. I came across a hymn with these opening lines. "I heard the voice of Jesus say come unto me and rest. Lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast."

Which is to say: when our life becomes a nightmare, as Abraham's had become, or when the world threatens to destroy us, as Herod threatened Jesus, we need a safe place.

And for me that's an invitation. That's an invitation to come to Jesus. We come to Jesus not to worship Jesus, but to receive the assurance that love is the way, the truth, and the life no matter how hard things may be.

And that brings us back to Abraham.

In the terrifying darkness of a nightmare—where many of us sometimes find ourselves—Abraham saw a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch. Then he heard a voice, saying: *Today I make a covenant with you. Do not be afraid.*

And that brings us back to the gospel.

Against the dark, terrifying threat from Herod, Jesus heard a voice echoing from another place, from Psalm 91: *You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.' She will cover you with her feathers, and under her wings you will find refuge.*

And that, as it turns out, is the voice of the Holy One we hear in the voice of Jesus, saying: *Come unto me. I am this dark world's light.*

And so we come to Jesus. We don't come to worship Jesus. We come to walk with Jesus. We walk in the way and the spirit and the faith of Jesus. Which is to say, we walk, we

kneel and we serve others in the light of love, without fear until our traveling days are done.