

People of Faith

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Lent, March 1, 2026

Readings: Genesis 12:1-4a; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

Sermon text: For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. Romans 4

In May I will taking two trips. One is with my wife and another friend, walking part of the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain. The other is a week long clergy conference called CREDO offered by the Church Pension Fund. How it works is that every ten years or so Episcopal clergy are invited to join a group of other clergy from around the country and take a dive into your core values, your current financial, emotional and spiritual state, what you doing vocationally and where you hope to go in the next five to ten years. There is good faculty and a time to meet people from other dioceses and compare notes. It’s a good perk.

Anyway, a packet of preliminary materials came this week and the first thing to do is Core Values, an exercise in self discovery. Hmmm.

So I started. The first assignment is to read a booklet called Becoming Ourselves Again: Reclaiming our Core Values. The beginning part, Passion and Principles, notes that for “people of faith” our primary shared core values are informed by God’s will as revealed truth in the Word through scripture, teaching of the church, lives of the faithful. Such core shared values in the Christian tradition include compassion for the vulnerable, forgiveness for the repentant, justice and dignity for all, purification of our hearts and action, responsible stewardship for God’s gifts.

The writer goes on to note that along with core values of shared faith each of us has individual secondary personal values. Someone who grew up believing that he is basically alone in this world and has only himself to rely on learns to value self-reliance. Another may have experience of being surrounded by attentive and loving adults, and so throughout her life she expresses the value of being in relationship, in community.

Another example: A woman who values self expression may become an artist—with much of her life defined by this value: it drives her daily schedule, how she spends her money, what she does on vacation, who many of her friends are. Self-expression is not only a core value and part of her identity it becomes the organizing principle for how she lives. Passion and principles work together to shape our lives.

It is, I think, a good exercise to reflect on one's values, passions and principles, both as deep commitments to shared values greater than our selves and those values that shape and drive us personally. After finishing these exercises and conference I will come back and lead a class on this. Clergy shouldn't have all the fun. Meanwhile this first look prompted not only self reflection but some thoughts on what we believe as so called "people of faith."

As used in the general culture these days the description "people of faith" serves as a marker for people of any and all religions. It is an ecumenical, interfaith identity signifying people whose values, ethics and politics are at least significantly shaped by their faith. Let me narrow the category down for now to people of the Book—Jews, Christians and Muslims—all of whom claim to be children of Abraham. That's a pretty big group—around a quarter of the world's population. God's promise to Abram that he would be the father of many nations has been fulfilled. Promises of land are still being contested—often tragically. And of course we need to pray this morning for a swift resolution of the war in Iran and for the establishment of enduring peace—a prayer that has ascended to heaven for generations—may it come to pass in ours.

There are objective measurements or indicators of a person's faith; shared core values of belief and practice. For a Jew the core profession of faith is the *Shema*, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one, the Lord our God is the only God, and practices include observance of Torah law. For Muslims, the five pillars: profession of faith (no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet) along with the practices of daily prayer, alms giving, fasting (we are in Ramadan the main season of fasting now) and, pilgrimage.

How about for Christians?

Well, we certainly have a profession of faith, embodied in the creeds. We have a set of practices Christians are committed to do, spelled out in the baptismal covenant. These include the shared values I spoke of earlier.

So we can say that in all of these religions of the Book there is a profession of faith in the one God (with the Christian God a Trinity in Unity)—a set of beliefs—and a set of practices. and that we may say is something like an objective markers of faith, core values. If one professes belief in God and tries to follow the way of Jesus one is a Christian.

Confirmation is a time, for instance, when young people and people who have not carefully considered their faith commitments take a closer look at the beliefs and practices they may have been baptized into as infants and decide for

themselves, yes, this is a way of life I want to be part, a set of core values I share.

Lent is a time when all of us benefit from taking an honest look at how our actual actions and way of life, line up with what we profess as our values, beliefs and practices. I profess faith in God—but am I really prepared to go when he calls, as Abram did? Do I put my trust in God or in the stock portfolio? I value compassion, justice, truth—but do I lend a hand when I'd prefer to take a nap, do the right thing and speak the truth even when it costs me?

Have I used the gifts God has given me to the fullest? Do I care for this part of the earth and these people and animals I have been given to take care of? Do I fulfill the responsibilities and duties of a good neighbor, a good citizen and a true follower of Christ?

Well, I say thank God we are not graded on our works, according to Paul, but given grace and mercy by a loving God. Yet we are called to grow, to stretch, to be transformed day by day and more and more into Christ likeness.

Have faith that God loves you, that Christ has saved you, and the holy Spirit, which blows wildly through our lives, is even now filling you with new life, new hope and is working through you to bring to earth the kingdom of heaven.

In Christ's name, amen

The Rev. Dr. Matthew Calkins, rector
Grace Church, Millbrook, NY