

Old Testament lesson – Genesis 15:1-18
New Testament lesson – Luke 13:31-35

The Weaver

I had lunch Friday with a friend of mine that I play Dungeons and Dragons with. Donald teaches online law classes, and he's only a few years younger than I am. He's a Christian and he has led an interesting life and we have several interests in common. At some point we started talking about history, and I mentioned a book on WW I that I have been reading for nearly a year.

I read the book in small snippets, usually less than four pages. It's called Pandora's Box, by Jörn Leonhard, a German historian. I bought it when Annette and I visited the WW I museum in Kansas City, when we were dog-sitting for our youngest son. It is a fascinating book.

I have read a lot about WW II and watched quite a few videos as well, but I had never studied much about WW I. I was always a bit puzzled about how one assassination had triggered such a catastrophic conflict that involved most of the world. I saw lots of war memorials in Scotland; every town had one, and there were even some that were sort of out in the country, not really in a town. Most of them were put up soon after WW I, and the dead soldiers of that war were listed on 3 of the 4 sides. The WW II deaths required only one side, something that surprised me, since the U. S. lost far more soldiers in WW II than we did in WW I.

Leonhard goes into great detail about every aspect of the war one would imagine, and then some. He discusses various pre-war historical developments in military history, economics, political thought, technology, colonization, and the relationships of ethnic groups within countries. He goes back as far as the French revolution of 1792. He describes how these various developments set the stage for the war, and how they eventually triggered the events that precipitated the war.

As he writes about the war itself, he talks about how the various changes of the previous century affected the war, and how the war affected each of those aspects of life as it

progressed. He tells how it brought about changes in warfare itself.

I have not reached the end of the book yet, but I am sure he will discuss the changes that the war caused in the peacetime world, such as the national boundaries that changed. I'm sure he will also describe how the results of WW I led to the outbreak of WW II. Some of the most interesting and surprising information concerned the communist revolution in Russia. There were actually two Russian revolutions in 1917. The first one overthrew the czarist government, and a provisional government was put in place to continue fighting the war. They apparently had the intention of creating a more democratically-ruled nation.

But then Vladimir Lenin returned from exile, with the help of the German government, and he helped fire up the Bolshevik revolution that eventually instituted communism and created the Soviet Union. Obviously, then, WW I provided the setting for the cold war that occupied so much of the 20th century. Then the Soviet Union also produced one Vladimir Putin, who still plays a part in world politics, and ironically, another European war.

I thought about this connectedness when I noticed something in our OT lesson. In verse 6, we read that Abram believed the LORD, and God reckoned that to him as righteousness. That verse and that concept are very important in Christian thought and doctrine, beginning with Paul and continuing to the present day.

This is important because even before God had given the Law to Moses, he had shown to Abram the means to be considered righteous in God's estimation: Trust God completely. The verse says Abram believed God, but it implies much more than merely believing something as simple as God's existence.

Abram was entrusting his entire future to God's promise. God had told Abram to leave his home and travel to this distant place, and he would make of him a great nation. Now Abram

was growing old, and so was his wife. The time for having children was past. How was God going to fulfill his promise? A servant was going to inherit all of Abram's possessions. What about that great nation? What about all the families of the earth blessing themselves through Abram?

In response to Abram's questioning, God sent him outside and told him to number the stars in the sky. If you've ever looked at the night sky in a dry climate, you know how the sky looks. You see more stars than you will around here at any time.

For some reason, Abram believed what God promised him at that time. He had believed God before. He left his home and traveled to an unknown destination when God told him to. But this time, the trust was apparently different somehow. The first time, Abram had been young and adventurous, a lad of only 75. Now, he was growing older, and he had some doubts about where this was all headed. Then God showed him the night sky.

Perhaps Abram realized that a God who could create such a thing just might be able after all to fulfill his promise to Abram. And so Abram did more than *believe* God could do it; he *trusted* him to actually do it. God saw that trust, and because of it, he counted Abram as righteous before him. He considered Abram to be in proper standing with God.

As I looked at this passage with the Strong's version of the Bible on a computer app, I noticed something about the word translated as "counted" or "reckoned." It comes from a root that means to plait, as with a braid, or to interpenetrate. So there is a literal sense of weaving or fabricating. This moves into a figurative sense of thinking, plotting, regarding, reckoning, or computing. So then, God reckoned Abram's trust as righteousness, giving him right standing before him.

It occurred to me that God was weaving righteousness into Abram because of his faith, his trust in God's promise.

And then we reach the end of the OT lesson, and we see the land that God promised to Abram. It is supposed to go from the river of Egypt – the Nile – to the great river, the Euphrates.

Uh-oh. That includes part of Egypt, part of Saudi Arabia, a large part of Jordan and Syria, and a chunk of Iraq. I don't think that claim would go over very well these days. As it is, the promise of land to Abraham has been woven into the fabric of history and affects the world to this day. If you don't believe me, check the news.

In our NT lesson, Jesus has a bit to say about history before it happens.

There is an unexpected warning at the beginning of the lesson. We are used to thinking about Pharisees as some of the "bad guys" in the gospel, but here some of them try to warn Jesus about Herod's intentions to kill him. This was not an empty threat; Herod had already killed John the Baptist.

Jesus does not deny the danger. He simply insists on continuing in the direction laid out for him. He must go to Jerusalem. True, that is where Herod is, and it is also where prophets of the LORD perish. So that is where Jesus must go to die, to be killed by a combination of Jewish and Roman authority, as they attempted to affect history in a certain way and failed miserably.

There is no way that Herod or the Romans or anyone else could determine the way history should go, not really. The weaver of history is the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of Jesus Christ. There were several times during his ministry when people seemed intent on killing Jesus. But they were not able to do so at those times, because none of them was the point when his death was woven into the design.

Jesus trusted God, and he trusted God's plan. Did he know beforehand how badly he would suffer? Did he know what it would be like for him when he took upon himself the sins of the entire human race – past, present and future? Did he know what the spiritual pain would feel like

when he was separated from his father because he *became* the sin of the world?

Whatever he knew or did not know ahead of time, he trusted in God. Of course, one might reason that Jesus, as the Son of God, knew that God the Father had everything worked out, and it would turn out fine in the end. But on the way to that end, there was still all that pain and suffering. As you probably recall, Jesus did ask his father if there might be some other way to accomplish this.

Abram, on the other hand, had only a limited human perspective. In fact, he had just expressed his skepticism about God's plan. He had questioned how God was going to keep his promise, since Abram did not yet have a child.

All it took to change his attitude was a short stroll outside and a view of the night sky. Abram was a man of antiquity. He did not have our relatively sophisticated understanding of stars and galaxies and black holes and comets and asteroids and planets with their own moons. And yet, looking at those stars was enough to convince him to trust God in this unrealistic promise. Here he was, probably past 90 by now, with his wife over 80, and he suddenly abandoned his doubts and trusted God to give him a child.

Wouldn't you love to have that kind of trust in God's plan for you?

Clearly, our situations are different from those of both Abram and Jesus. We have not been promised that through our descendants we would become a great nation or be a blessing to all the families of the world. We are not headed for a death that will take away the sin of the world. As far as we know, we are not destined to be tortured and executed as a part of God's plan for human history.

But what if we were? How could we find the trust we would need? Perhaps we could look at the night sky and think that if God can create and maintain all that, he can handle what is coming our way, and carry us through it. We could trust him for that.

What about something more realistic, more likely? How would we handle it if we find out we have cancer, or a heart condition or something in our brain that is going to shorten our life? Or worse, what if we find out that our spouse or a child has such a condition? How are people able to trust God in such times?

If you have ever seen the back side of a tapestry, you might have noticed that it is often hard to tell what it is. Sometimes it looks like just a mess. But when you see the other side, you realize how beautiful it is.

In a similar way, if you come upon someone beginning to weave something, it might not look like much. It might be difficult to recognize what it is. But as you watch the weaver work, you will eventually see the pattern or the image, whatever it is that is being created.

God is at work, weaving all of human history as he weaves all of these billions of lives. We might be able to look back and see how many different factors were woven together to bring about a great war like WW I, and how that war released many threads to be woven into the history that followed.

We can look back and perhaps see how God has woven many different things together to bring us to the point where we find ourselves today. We can learn how he has brought others through difficulty. We can recall how he brought life out of the death of his Son Jesus.

We can consider such things as these, and realize that the weaver is trustworthy. God is indeed worthy of our trust. He will take whatever we encounter and he will weave it into our life. As we trust God in this way, he weaves our faith and trust into our lives as part of our fabric, so that the side we do not yet see becomes a beautiful work of God.

On this side of the tapestry, it might seem to be a mess. We might not be able to recognize what God is putting together. But in time, he will

reveal it to us. Until then, we must trust his craftsmanship.

Let us trust God, even as we pray for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.