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## WORD MADE FLESH

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Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

### **Bargaining with God\***

Genesis 18:20-32, Psalm 137/138, Colossians 2:12-14, Luke 11:1-13

The generosity of God? Forgiveness. How absurd.

Genesis and the Gospel text battle with each other today. Jesus tells his disciples that God, like a father, will answer the persistent petitions of those who seek, who knock, who ask. They will receive the bread of life even in the night of darkness. An optimistic text surely, for those who dwell in that darkness, that time when definition fades and all one has is the insecurity of faith.

And Abraham, what do we make of him as he pleads for Sodom and Gomorrah, pleads that a few be spared, that none who are just be destroyed by God. It reads as if Abraham was bargaining with the deity. Abraham was good at bargaining as was Moses. Bargaining with the deity: sparing the whole city for the sake of a few just men and women.

How absurd it all seems. Surely these texts are striving to jar our minds and hearts loose from conventional thinking and consider again the way of creation.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God who cares, the lover of all human beings - all sinners - who sustains the very being of the world despite all that is life-denying. Abraham's bargaining is with you and me. He is asking, seeking, those among us who will let justice rain down, who will call the city to turn from the path of death-dealing. How many does it take for the city to be spared of its own death-dealing?

Follow the conversation in heaven: it takes just you or me, one person to affirm life, to affirm the presence of the kingdom of God.

This is not a text on the bargaining of Abraham before Zeus or some other Olympian deity. It is Abraham's struggle to recognize that the issue, finally, is not how many who are just can be found. God, the lover of every person, has no vengeance. It is human beings acting to extract the full value of what they deem they are owed by life that leads to sin and destruction.

The God of life calls us, woe us always and only to life. It only takes one person to offer bread, sustenance, and hospitality to those who come seeking, knocking, in the darkness of night. Such offerings are the bread of life given for the sake of the world.

The reading from Colossians prepares us to see that the Gospel is precisely about forgiveness, about cancelled debts. For those baptized into the death of Christ, life is no longer about debt and repayment. The love of God which heals, feeds, and brings light to those possessed by darkness is all consuming. Abraham,

the solitary wanderer, finally comes to realize that he, he alone, was required to be just, to bare the gift of life and save the city.

All these texts are to deepen our prayer, when we as Jesus taught us, pray, "Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come; give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us. And do not put us to the test."

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