

**The Second Sunday in Lent**  
**Revised Common Lectionary, Year C**  
**February 28, 2010**  
**St. James' Episcopal Church, Pullman, WA**  
**The Rev. Mary Beth Rivetti, Rector**

*Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-35*

Probably as long as humans have looked up, they have been filled with wonder at the sight of stars. We are citizens of heaven says St. Paul. We set our eyes on a world beyond our own narrow concerns, confident that we are mystically enrolled in the communion of saints as we participate in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Just as often as humans have looked to the skies, they have looked around them and tried to make human sense of the experience of God. The Lord God promises Abram that he will be his shield, his strong rock. Abram replies, "Lord, what will you give me?" The Lord God shows Abram the skies. Abram replies "Lord, how will I know?" So the Lord God affirms faith with Abram through the very weird (to us) ritual of covenant, moving between the carcasses of the sacrificed animals, as if to say, "This will happen to me if I go back on this ritual." As if God could say, "Cross my heart and hope to die!" And the Lord God does that because God desires us, and meets us where we are. Our story from the beginning of time, fashioned by a people in exile who wanted to recount to their own descendants the long-ago hope, the long-ago promise, is that we are a part of that ocean of stars. And just as humanly, we create narratives of hope for us that are not hope for others. Our most dramatic story of salvation, the liberation of slaves from Egypt and their safe passage through the sea on dry land also includes the destruction of the first-born children of Egypt, the destruction of the army of Pharaoh. Our humanity excludes even as it includes. Each of us, individually and corporately, move through that dance of looking at the stars and looking back around us to see how broad can be the web of inclusion; how vast is our citizenship of heaven.

As Paul writes to the Christians in Philippi, he has been challenged by fellow-believers who have come into Philippi after him to "correct" his understanding of the Gospel of Christ. No, to be a true believer in Jesus, they proclaim, we must become like him in all ways, including undergoing the ritual of circumcision and obeying the dietary laws of Pharisaic Judaism. They've made an idol over their reading of the traditions and scripture, an idol that Paul once worshipped fervently himself before his encounter on the road to Damascus showed him the face of Christ in the very people he was persecuting. "Their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame." Their god is in what they eat; their glory is in their focus on unmentionable body parts. To that claim, Paul asserts that we are citizens of heaven. We look up to the vast array of stars, we are all drawn without condition to the one who created all things, who invites us to become ever more conformed to his body of glory.

As citizens of heaven we are gathered under the wings of the mother hen, all of us, scrunched together in all our differences, by the one who set his face resolutely to Jerusalem knowing that his life would be ended by the authorities there – faithful servants of God and Rome who believed that Jesus was a threat to public safety and an abomination to scripture and tradition. Our faith teaches us that when we gather here at this table, Christ is mystically present in body and blood. We believe that the one who promised to return when we proclaim "blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord," is with us in the blessing and breaking of the bread and in the sharing of the cup. Here at this table we step into the heavenly realm, the countless realms of the stars, and are lifted up together, without exclusion, into the loving embrace of our creator.