

## **Advent II**

Isaiah 11:1-10

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

I stumbled onto a Greek word this past Monday (yes, that's when the sermon prep begins for Sunday). I want to share it with you because I am excited about what it means and, frankly, there is no English equivalent for it. The word is **βεβαιῶ** (*bebaioo*). It is from the Letter to the Romans, chapter 15. Before I jump into it, I need to cover something with you. Paul wrote this letter to the Church in Rome. He did so in 1<sup>st</sup> century Greek. It's a durable language that translates almost like a hand in a glove to 21<sup>st</sup> century English... except for a few words, like *bebaioo*.

Here is the passage:

For the glory of God, in the same way that Christ welcomed you, welcome each other. I am saying that Christ became a servant of those who are circumcised for the sake of God's truth, in order to **CONFIRM** (*bebaioo*) the promises given to the ancestors, and so that the Gentiles could glorify God for his mercy.

Romans 15:7-9

Paul was writing to a congregation that had both people of the Jewish faith and gentiles. When he writes "the circumcised" he is most likely referring to the Jewish people. The first part – for the glory of God, welcome one another as Christ welcomed you – I think is the main point of the reading. Paul then wrote that Christ "became a servant" to the people of the Jewish faith to *bebaioo* the promises given the ancestors. Let's unpack that part. We have Christ, Abraham and Issac and Jacob, and the promises given to them. That's saying a lot.

Starting with Abraham, the father of the faith, he was in retirement when God called him to travel west and become a mighty nation. He was childless, and comfortably retired, but, because of faith, Abraham and Sarah left to follow God. At one point, Abraham was, in my opinion, feeling a little down because nothing had happened yet – no offspring. God called him outside, at night (of course, that's when anxiety seems to be the highest and also when God does his best work). He told Abraham to look up, see the stars, and count them. He obviously couldn't. God said: You'll have more descendants than the number of stars. That's quite a promise!

Abraham and Sarah gave birth to Issac. He and Rebecca gave birth to Jacob – and Jacob had twelve offspring that became the 12 Tribes of Israel. They became numerous, for sure, but there seems to be a lot of stars up there (before of course light pollution obscured the stars we see on the earth). Paul wrote that Christ came to bring the Gentiles to God in mercy and in glory. Christ is the bridge that brings the Gentiles to the faith of Abraham and Issac and Jacob. Now that's a lot of stars!

The promise to Abraham was *bebaioo* – “confirmed” – in way that Gentiles have responded to the faith. They received mercy from God and now give God praise and glory.

There were a number of words Paul could have used to describe the “confirmation” of the promise. But, he choose *bebaioo*. According to several Greek to English dictionaries (of Koine, 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greek), *bebaioo* means the following in English:

To make firm  
To establish  
To make sure

When the Greek/English dictionary gives three non-synonymous definitions it can be for one of two reasons: first, the Greek word carries different meanings depending on how it’s used in the sentence. The word “kai” is a great example. It means either “and” or “but” in English. Translators read how “kai” is used in the sentence to see if it includes things (like “this *and* that”) or if it’s comparing (“not this *but* that”). The second reason is that there is no English equivalent and the only way to get to the root of the meaning is to add a few different meanings in English together. When Romans 15 was translated into English, the translators could have written the sentence like this: ... *in order to make firm, establish, and make sure the promises given to the ancestors...* A translation like that would make the clunky and long letter to the Romans even longer and harder to understand. So, the translators have to choose something like “confirm”.

Here’s my argument – “confirm” is not a strong enough word in English to use to explain the Greek word *bebaioo*. Have you ever had your rental car reservation confirmed only to find there are no cars waiting for you? Or, have you ever confirmed your hotel room reservation to find out when you arrived there were no more rooms? I think we need to take a long look at a word that means *to make firm/to establish/to make sure*. I am thinking something like “making-manifest” or “incarnating”. Or “establishing with proof”. The Gentiles, worshiping with the Jewish people, in one voice, glorifying God is the *proof, the manifesting, the incarnating* of the promise given to Abraham.

There is one more aspect I’d like to bring up. The tense of the verb *bebaioo* is a tense that we do not have (yet) in English. Signified by the last letter of the word **βεβαιόω** the tense of this verb is aorist which means an action that happened in the past is still happening today and will happen in the future. English writes the aorist tense in this way: as it was, is now and will be (amen). If we translate *bebaioo* as “established”, it would read like this: *in order to have confirmed, to confirm and will be confirmed the promises given to the ancestors...*

The people in the Church in Rome in the early 0060’s (first century) have become the confirmation of the promise given to Abraham, they are the confirmation, and they will be the confirmation. That’s where you and I, and All Angels on Longboat Key in the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the 21<sup>st</sup> century enter the picture. We are the *bebaioo* of the promise to Abraham. The fact, the proof, the establishment, the making sure and firm foundation of us worshiping Christ together in one voice is the *bebaioo*! We are this generation of that ancient promise to Abraham. And, it doesn’t

stop with us; thanks be to God. We are moving that proof/establishment/incarnation of the promise into the next generation. Today, we are the confirmation of the promise.

Confirmation is important in the spiritual life. Abraham believed God without any proof at all. His faith was outstanding. His faith was like Noah's faith that started building the ark before the rain started to fall. We, however, have been given a faith tradition through Abraham. We can look around at one another and see that we are the confirmation. At the same time, I love confirmation of the promise. There are many letters and cards on my desk from people whose lives have been changed because of the mission and ministry of All Angels. These letters are confirmation to me of what we have been, are, and will be striving to do – to bring the Living Christ to those inside and outside the church.

Confirmation is important. We will be partaking in Holy Communion today. It's a visible, tangible confirmation of Christ's body in our body. We light candles because it's Advent – two candles are lit today to remind us there are two Sundays to go until the Nativity. Our spiritual ancestors lit candles to remind us of the waiting for the birth. In a hundred years from now, on this second Sunday of Advent, there will be people lighting candles waiting for the Nativity. We are their confirmation. Our spiritual ancestors are our confirmation.

For the glory of God, we welcome one another as Christ has welcomed, is welcoming and will welcome us. We light candles to remember that Christ became a servant so that we can be and are the *bebaioo* of the promise given to Abraham. We are the confirmation and it is a visible sign of God's mercy. As a response, we, together with one voice, give glory to God. Amen!