

## The Faith of Abraham

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...**

In our reading this morning from the Book of Genesis we read that when Abraham was 90 years old the Lord appeared to him (and made with him a covenant) – that if Abraham would continue walking blameless (which has nothing to do with being perfect but in keeping faith in God’s promises) that the Lord would not only make his name great (but would give him descendants more numerous than all the stars in the nighttime sky) ...

It’s quite a promise (especially since Abraham is now very old) and he and his wife, Sarah, have never been able to have children of their own in the past... it’s also not the first time that the Lord had made a promise with Abraham...

In fact, in the 13 chapters in the Book of Genesis (that are specifically dedicated to his story) God had promised that He would give to Abraham and to his descendants the Land of Milk and Honey – that He would bless those who blessed Abraham and curse those who cursed him – that God would make him prosperous and fruitful (and that even nations and kings would come from his seed) ...

And if you know the story of Abraham (then you also know that each one of the promises of God were seemingly more impossible to believe than the next)... and even though Abraham didn’t have to follow any commandments, didn’t need to fight any battles, didn’t have to love any neighbors, or even give up anything for Lent... Abraham was deemed righteous in the eyes of God (not because of his good works) but based on his willingness to believe in the Word of the Lord (even when there was absolutely no proof that these promises would come true)...

And ever since – from the Apostle Paul to Mother Theresa – from Martin Luther to Martin Luther King, jr. – and for Muslims, Jews, and Christians (Abraham has served as the first ‘*gold standard*’ of faith)... as the primal believer who trusted God’s promises (even though he had no earthly evidence that these promises were going to come true)...

And perhaps this is also why we can say that Abraham was the first one to be saved (not by his good works) but through (what St. Paul refers to in our second reading this morning from Romans 4:13 as, “the righteousness of faith” ... and it was because of his faith (that Abraham saw these promises unfold) and God’s goodness come to pass... a goodness that shapes the world – even unto this day...

You know, the Bible has a lot to say about this type of faith... in fact, it tells us that **even those with faith** the size of a mustard seed (will be able to move mountains)... they will be given what they ask for... the doors they knock on will be opened... and nothing will be impossible for those who have faith...

Now that's great news (if you're one of them)... The problem is – I don't know many people with that type of faith... and I only say that because most of the people I know are afraid that they don't have faith... or should I say, not enough of it... or perhaps, not the right kind...

Ask them how they know and they'll tell you that they don't believe everything written in the Bible... that they struggle with the miracle stories – or the healing stories – or the story of creation... and most are not *even remotely convinced* that God loves them (just the way they are)... they try hard to do what is right (but that isn't moving a lot of mountains for them)... in fact, some can't even sleep at night (especially nowadays with the turmoil of our world)... or they spend their days worrying about everything from where their children will go to college (to whether or not they will ever have enough money to eventually retire themselves)...

*"If only they had more faith"* they say- then maybe life would be easier... *"If only they had more faith"* then maybe they wouldn't be so angry... or so afraid... or depressed... or confused... and maybe if they had faith (like Abraham) – some think to themselves - they too would be resting on the promises of God...

But nowhere in the Bible does it tell us that Abraham had perfect faith... yes, it tells us that he was the first one to follow his heart and trust in our god – which is why Jews, Christians, and Muslims all refer to him as the 'Father of our Faith' - (but if you read his story you'll see that his faith fell short many times as well)...

In fact, when Abraham was called by the Lord to go to the land of Canaan there was a famine in that land (and at first, he went to Egypt instead)... and while in Egypt he passed off his wife, Sarah, as his sister (out of fear that the Egyptians might kill him for her)... he lies again in chapter 20 when confronted by a man named Abimelech... and after God told him that he would bear a Son (we're told that Abraham gets tired of waiting for the Lord to make good on His promise) and takes matters into his own hands by impregnating his slave girl Hagar – instead of his own wife) which to this day continues to cause trouble in the Middle East between Arabs and Jews...

and, of course, we could also take a look at the many times that Abraham questioned God, or when he tried to persuade the Lord with guilt (to save his nephew, Lot, from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah), or even the times when Abraham was scared (always prompting the Lord to say, “Do not be afraid” before he was sent out on his mission) ...

And my point is that if there’s any good news (or hope for those of us who know ourselves too well to brag about our own perfected state of being) it’s that the story of Abraham is a testimony to the belief that God doesn’t bless based on perfection – but blesses those who have faith... a faith that itself is often imperfect, so often stumbles, makes mistakes, or even falls short from time to time... but a faith that keeps coming back (not as a testimony of what we can do on our own) but as a gift of God’s great love to show what He can do (with imperfect people – like you - and like me)...

Perhaps this is why St. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith... And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”*

Or why David tells us in Psalm 3:5, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and **He** will make your paths straight”*...

And, of course, we remember the story of the Doubting Thomas where Jesus says to him in John 20:29, *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; but blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* ...

And friends, the truth is that our eyes see many things in this world (and sometimes when we’re not careful the things of this world can take our eyes off of God – and it can cause us to stumble along the way)... perhaps even stray from the Lord...

But I want you to leave here this morning remembering – that no one ever expected perfection from you (perfection can only come from Jesus Christ) but like it was for Abraham (who was as cranky and full of character flaws before he met the Lord - as he was after) your faith might seem small in the larger scheme of the world’s problems (and perhaps even in comparison to the weight of your sin) but that doesn’t mean that God hasn’t been using you (in powerful ways)... possibly ways you can’t even see...

And so, I want to close with a very short story that I shared with you in this pulpit about 10 years ago - a story that some of you may have heard - about an old man

who every morning would bring a bucket with him down to the river to fetch water...

Well, the way that the story is told the bucket comes to life and realizes that it's own imperfections... in fact, in two different places the bucket had small leaks (and because of these leaks almost a quarter of the water would leak out before the old man could reach home)...

Feeling guilty about being so useless and so flawed – the bucket finally finds the courage to speak up and says, *“Oh, who are we kidding, Old Man?... I'm not worth keeping... I mean, the only task you've given to me to do is carry water (and look at the mess I always make)... surely you can find a more useful bucket than me”* ...

But the old man looked at the bucket and said, *“I've known about your flaws for many years”*... and then looking back at his beautiful and vibrant garden, he said, *“and it was through your cracks that my flowers were being watered”* ...

And friends, you might not have perfect faith and you probably don't see yourself as a perfect person – none of us do - (but that doesn't mean that God isn't still using you in wonderful ways)... perhaps in ways you don't even realize... and because of those things not only should we praise the name of Jesus (but we can rest assure that God's love will never leave us)...

May the peace of Christ be with you on your Lenten journey... may the love of our Lord continue still to live in your heart... and may your faith be counted as righteousness (not only in this world – but in the World to Come)...

In Jesus' name we pray...

**Amen!**