

Second Sunday In Lent – March 16, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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(Genesis 12:1-8)

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 2) "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3) I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." 4) So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. 5) He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. **6) Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7) The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.** 8) From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

Dear fellow believers in our Lord;

People love to talk about faith and to talk about what God will do for them. "I just know that God's wants me to get that job or marry that person or you can fill in the blank. Unfortunately in many cases it's just that – it's talk. It's more like wishful thinking than faith because for many there is no connection between faith and the Word. People often say that God will do this or that when there is no Word of God to rely on. Faith is not believing what we want but what God says.

The Scriptures are filled with examples of men of faith such as Abraham in our text for today. From them we can learn that

Theme: Faith Relies on the Word of God

1. Faith believes the Word
2. Faith acts on the Word
3. Faith spreads the Word

Our text begins with a simple statement: The LORD had said to Abram... The object of Abram's faith was the Lord – the Lord who spoke to him with his commands and his promises. True faith always has the Lord as its object and rests on the Lord's commands and promises. Sometimes the Lord's commands seem difficult and maybe even unreasonable but faith reminds us that since they come from the LORD we have no reason to question them.

What was it that the Lord said to Abram? **"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 2) "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3) I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."**

The Lord commanded Abram to do some difficult things. It's hard to leave behind your country – the trip alone would have been difficult for Abram. It's not always easy to leave behind the familiar and comfortable place that we call home.

A couple of weeks ago I was talking with an individual who had traveled to Orlando. I asked him how he enjoyed his trip. I was sure that he would have been delighted to be able to escape the cold and snow of this past winter. Instead he expressed how happy he was to be back home – he liked to sleep in his own bed, to

eat at places that were familiar to him – he just didn't care for life on the road. I wonder how he would have felt if he had been traveling in a foreign country without his family.

It's hard to leave your homeland even for a short time. It's even harder to leave behind your people. But that's what God commanded Abraham to do. But perhaps the hardest thing of all that God commanded Abram to do was to leave his Father's household – his place of security, his livelihood, his roots and family ties and to go to an unknown place.

It would take faith in the Lord and his promises for Abram to set out for the land the Lord had chosen for his new home. God knew that what he had commanded Abram was difficult but God had some wonderful promises for Abram – promises which required faith.

God does not expect faith to rest on thin air; nor does he want faith to rest on the thoughts or feelings of any individual person. Many great men and women have accomplished great things simply by believing they could do it. But true faith doesn't rest on human opinion or human will. Nor is true faith blind in the sense that it knows nothing at all.

True faith is in and from God's word. Romans 10:17 assures us **Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** The word of Christ is the source and the object of true faith. A fine hymn verse puts it this way: *"How firm a foundation is laid for your faith in his excellent word..."*

Although Abram was being asked to travel to an unknown land, he was being encouraged by the Lord who made him some trustworthy promises. In fact there were 7 promises in our text alone:

1. I will make you into a great nation – with six hundred years God made a nation of over two million people from one childless 75 year old man and his barren 65 year old wife.
2. I will bless you – God's blessings included success and prosperity.
3. I will make your name great – thousands of years after the Lord promised this we still speak of Abram as the Father of believers.
4. You will be a blessing – God used Abram to bring blessings to others. He rescued the people of Sodom when they were taken hostage by four kings who attacked their city. Some time later Lot was rescued from the city of Sodom before it was destroyed by the Lord. Of course the greatest blessing Abram would give to others would be his offspring Jesus – our Lord and Savior.
5. I will bless those who bless you – as a prophet of the Lord Abram called upon the Lord and praised him proclaiming his promises. The Lord would bring spiritual blessings to those who believed the words Abram spoke in the name of the Lord.
6. Whoever curses you I will curse – While those who believed would rejoice at Abram's message and bless him, as God's people still do today when they hear the Gospel, there is always another reaction to the Word of the Lord. There are sadly those who reject the message and the messenger. Rejection of God's word would bring judgment.
7. All peoples will be blessed through you. God's Savior born of the Virgin Mary would trace his genealogy back to Abram. Galatians 3:8 explains: **The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."**

These seven specific promises strengthened Abrams faith. True faith believes the word. Familiarity with God's promises to us will also strengthen our faith.

While God does not give us specific promises of great wealth in his word he does give this command and promise: (Hebrews 13:5) **Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."**

While God never promises us a trouble free life in his Word he promises to be our refuge and strength and an ever-present help in time of need. (cf. Psalm 46)

And what about God's promises of forgiveness: (Isaiah 1:18) **"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.** (1 John 1:9) **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.** (1 John 2:1-2) **My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2) He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**

And let's not forget the Lord's promises regarding our future; (Acts 14:22) **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."** (John 14:2) **In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.**

(John 14:6) **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

(John 14:13-14) **And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.**

Those are faith building promises that beckon us to follow the Lord, not blindly, but trusting firmly in the promises of the one who is able to keep them as evidenced by the promises made to Abram and kept by the Lord.

Faith believes the Word and Faith acts on the word. Our text tells us: **4) So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. 5) He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.**

The action God wanted was for Abram to move. God's sevenfold promise worked the faith required for the journey and the relocation. God's call to Abram was unique and specific to him. Yet there is a principal that we can apply to our lives: God gives us promises of grace and blessing to create faith and empower faith to act. He wants us to hear his word and to keep it – to follow his commands and to put our faith into action. It is his desire for us to cling to his promises as we take him at his Word and follow his commands.

And yet so often we fail to take the Lord at his Word. We neglect his commands. We ignore his promises. We often travel a path of our own making and choosing. And often we find ourselves stuck in such a predicament that we have no choice but to call to mind the Lord's promises and to plead his mercy and seek his help and blessing and the Lord remains true to his word as the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy: (2 Timothy 2:13) **if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.**

In gratitude we resolve to once again act on God's commands and promises. And in the process we'll end up praising the Lord to others. As we see in our text, Faith spreads the Word. **Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.**

Abram had followed the Lord's leading – he arrived at a major city at the center of Palestine and stopped at a well known land-mark – the great tree of Moreh. It was there that the Lord appeared with another faith creating and sustaining promise. **7) The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.**

By building an altar to the Lord Abram established a wonderful testimony to the Canaanites who believed in other gods. When the world observes Christians joyfully going to their altars (their places of worship) regularly they will understand that they treasure their relationship with their God – the God of grace. The cars parked in our parking lot are a testimony to all who pass by that we treasure the time spent here in the Lord's house. When Christians build and maintain their places of worship and facilities there is a testimony that they are serious about serving the Lord and interested in reaching out to others with the Word. Our presence here and our continued support of the Lord's work is a testimony of how important our Lord is to us. It's a way to let our light shine before men so that they may see our deeds and praise our Father in heaven.

Wherever Abram went, his faith went too. **8) From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.**

Calling on the name of the Lord normally involved worship and proclaiming the name of the Lord to others. Abram shared his faith with others.

True faith spreads the Word as we live according to it, as we gather around it, as we support those who travel to places where we cannot go and also as we use our own lips to tell of the wonderful promises the Lord has made to us.

Our Lord has called us to faith. He has equipped us for a journey of following his will in this life and sharing his wonderful message of salvation with others. He has committed himself to settling us in the promised land of heaven at journey's end.

This Lenten season as we have the opportunity to follow Jesus as he heads to the cross – we're reminded once again of how serious Jesus was about wanting us to follow his commands. It was for our neglect of those commands that God sacrificed his son on the cross. We are also reminded how serious God is about keeping his promises – he did not hold back. He offered his Son to take our place so that through faith in him we might enjoy the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

May the Word of God always be precious to you! May its promises inspire, comfort and encourage you and its commands guide you in thank-filled living as it strengthens your faith into a faith that believes the word, acts on the word and spreads the word. Amen.