

Simple Faith

Text: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Romans 4:13-25 (Series B. 2nd Sunday of Lent) Ps. 22:23-31

Mark 8:31-38

God promised Abraham a lot of descendants. And when it all seemed hopeless, Abraham still had faith in God and became the ancestor of many nations. Abraham's faith never became weak, not even when he was nearly a hundred years old.

Let us pray

The Guinness Book of World Records lists records of achievement. It lists the weight of the heaviest man ever as 635 kg (1400 lbs). The tallest man was 272 cm (8 feet, 11 inches). What is the world's record for bearing children? It is listed as sixty-nine children. The record states that a Russian woman achieved this great honour. She had sixteen sets of twins, seven sets of triplets, and four sets of quadruplets. She gave birth twenty-seven times! I don't think anyone today will try to break this record. But where the Guinness Book of World Records is wrong is that it states that the oldest mother to give birth was aged 57. Sarah beat that record by a comfortable margin.

The story about Abraham and Sarah is an amazing one. This is the story of the oldest couple to give birth to their first child. Sarah was 90 and Abraham 100. We all know about the biological clock. There comes a time when it is no longer possible for a child to be conceived. Well, the biological clock had certainly stopped ticking for Abraham and Sarah. When Abraham was told that he would soon be a father, he responded with total honesty. We are told that he fell to the ground laughing, saying, 'How can anyone as old as Sarah and I possibly have children?'

When Sarah heard the news, she also had a good chuckle at the idea of her becoming a mother for the first time. Some people try to explain away this laughter saying that it was laughter of joy and excitement. I don't think so. These two old people were as human as you and I.

I dare say that if the oldest person reading this sermon were told the same news, he /she would react much the same way. Twenty-five years had gone by since God had first promised Abraham that he would have many descendants. And now in their old age, God says that he will keep his promise and that in nine months time, Sarah will give birth to a son.

This long delay certainly tested Abraham's faith in God and his promise, but Abraham never gave up on the idea that he would be the father of many nations. The Apostle Paul deliberated on Abraham's faith in his letter to the Romans.

Let me read just a bit of it again: "*Abraham believed and hoped, even when there was no reason for hoping ... He was then almost one hundred years old; but his faith did not weaken when he thought of his body, which was already practically dead, or of the fact that Sarah could not have children. His faith did not leave him, and he did not doubt God's promise; his faith filled him with power, and he gave praise to God. He was absolutely sure that God would be able to do what he had promised*" (Romans 4:18-21).

That's a great description of what faith is. Abraham's faith filled him with certainty that God would do what he promised.

- ❖ He believed, even when it was illogical to believe.
- ❖ His faith in God and in his promise filled him with power, with the ability to endure, with the strength to overcome doubt, to the point where he praised God in spite of the circumstances.
- ❖ His faith in God enabled him to overcome all kinds of objections, hardship, perhaps ridicule from others when he told them that he would be a father of a great nation, even though he had no children.

Abraham simply focused on God; he was certain that God would somehow fulfill his promise. This was nothing new for Abraham. Remember how God told him to pack up and leave his home, the place of his birth and his parents' home, to an undisclosed destination. Abraham trusted that God knew what he was doing.

Abraham knew the character of God. Now, what is the character of God? The character of God is this: God is *independent, unchangeable / immutable, eternal, omniscient (all-knowing), wise, truthful, faithful, good, loving, merciful, graceful, patient, Holy, Righteous, Just, and Jealous*.

This was not blind faith on Abraham's part either. This was an intelligent faith that knew in whom he could trust and firmly knew who would travel through life with him, no matter what that journey might bring and where it would take him. This was an intelligent faith that believed that God always keeps his promises.

Faith can't be based on emotional ups and downs. Faith must have an object - and that object is Truth. This truth is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who encompasses all truth. I personally believe in an objective truth that is in the person of Jesus Christ, who was, who is, and who is to come again.

Faith is looking away from what we can personally achieve and looks at what God can do **for us**, and **with us**, and **through us**. Faith is realizing that we are at a point where we can do nothing to change our circumstances, and we should look to God who has the power to make a difference. We see that in Abraham – there was absolutely nothing that he could do about having many descendants. He relied only on God. This was entirely in God's hands.

He took God at his word, trusted his promises and believed in his power to make this a reality. That's why God waited so long. In no way could Abraham or Sarah take the credit. God did it all! Their childbearing days were over, by human standard. If God was going to create a nation from Abraham's descendants, then it was up to God to do something about it.

Abraham trusted God that he knew what he was doing. Maybe it has been your experience that when all human effort has failed and supports have been pulled out from under you, it has been your faith in God's love and his goodness that has kept you going.

- ❖ When sickness and pain have been almost too much to endure, it is our faith in God that has strengthened us and got us through.
- ❖ When fear for the future grips our soul, it is faith that assures us that God has everything under control.
- ❖ When grief tears us apart, it is faith in God's promises of hope, his ever-abiding love, and his assurance of eternal life that enables you to cope.

- ❖ When we are depressed or overwhelmed and our self-worth is at rock bottom, it is our faith in God that gets us on top of things again.

I don't want to make this sound too simplistic and be too blasé about the struggles that we all have. Faith in God's love and care ought to banish all our problems. But our human nature gets in the way.

We are often involved in a struggle between faith and doubt. A battle goes on inside of us as we try to decide whether we ought to trust God to help us or whether he will leave us to fight our own way through the turmoil. Having faith in God does some amazing things in our life. Faith in no way relies on our human ability to trust and believe. God comes to us and gives faith. The Holy Spirit strengthens our faith through God's Word and Sacrament.

God knows just how weak we are when it comes to trusting God and letting God take control. Unconditionally, freely, and completely, God offers to stick with us and to save us at the end of the worst day.

The apostle Paul then wraps up his discussion about Abraham's faith by applying it directly to you and to me this morning. The story of Abraham is not just for him, nor is it simply an ancient account of how God used to work. No, this story is written in the Bible for our instruction. The God of Abraham is our God, too. The God of the Old Testament is the same gracious and forgiving God today.

- ❖ Because of faith, we know that Jesus has dealt with our sin and that, as far as God is concerned, sin is forgiven and forgotten.
- ❖ Because of faith, we know that God has established a special and unique relationship with us through our baptism.
- ❖ In faith, we believe that Jesus' resurrection assures us that we, too, shall live after death.
- ❖ In faith, we are certain that our Good Shepherd helps us and walks with us over the rough terrain, the storms of our life, and will take our hand, as we walk through the valley of the shadow death.
- ❖ Faith calls us to turn away from trusting in ourselves, to defy all notions that God doesn't care, and that death and destruction is the end of us.
- ❖ Faith that trusts the promises of God, based on the Character of God.
- ❖ Faith is a lifestyle. It is something that we live each day.

In conclusion, may God grant us the kind of faith that Abraham had – a faith that trusts that God has his arm around us as we walk through life – a faith that believes that he will never ignore one of those whom he loves – a faith that is certain that he is ready to hear our prayers and help us when there is no other help.

Black History Month

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Lift Every Voice and Sing # 841
- If You But Trust in God to Guide You #769
- What a Friend We Have in Jesus # 742

Let us pray: *(prayer from National Bishop)*

Jesus, our friend, you invite us to share everything with you in prayer: our hopes, our joys, our sorrows, our temptations. Send your Spirit to guide us and strengthen us in prayer. Precious Saviour, we thank you for giving us solace and the comfort of your love and grace. Amen.

Happy Birthday

Birthdays: *Svend Berg, Essex Philip Udeh, Rikke Louise Baur-Jock*