

INI - SDG

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent

March 20, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

**Text: Genesis 12:1-8 *Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your kindred, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.***

Theme: GOD SPEAKS AND FAITH RESPONDS

- Cheerfully obeying His commands
- Worshipping Him for His promises

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

How much do you know about Abraham? When we think of Abraham we might think of a man to whom God promised he would have a son, but that son was not born until he and his wife were well into their 90's. Or we might remember how years later God tested Abraham's faith, by telling him to kill that only son as a burnt offering to him. Or maybe we remember how Abraham pleaded with God many different times to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, if there were enough righteous people living there.

But have you ever stopped to think about how similar we are to Abraham? While we don't expect God to give us a child when we are in our 90's nor do we expect Him to ask us to sacrifice any of our children, we are very similar to Abraham. When God first called Abraham, or Abram as his name was then, he was living in Ur of the Chaldees and later in the city of Haran - both in modern day Iraq - Abram was an idolator, just like his family was. They did not worship the one, true God of Creation. But all that changed when God called Abram. By His almighty power He took Abram from the power of darkness and unbelief to the light of faith in Him.

Do you begin to see how similar we are to Abraham? While I am not aware of any of you ever openly worshipping false gods, we all were born in the same spiritual condition as Abraham. God had to call us out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. Abram's call

was a call of grace. He did not deserve to be called into the Kingdom of God, much less become a forefather of our Savior Jesus. Ours was an election of grace as well. We do not deserve to be members of the Kingdom of God. But out of His undeserved love, God has made us His children. And as God called Abraham His friend, Jesus calls us His friends. All this by the grace of God.

So what binds us together with Abraham is God's grace and our faith. Abraham had faith in the promises of God and we have faith in the promises of God. In fact, we heard the Apostle Paul write in our New Testament lesson that those who live according to faith are, in that way, children of Abraham (Rom. 4:16). So let us this morning, examine our faith and the faith of our father Abraham. Let us examine how for both of us, God speaks and faith responds. It responds in obedience to His commands and in worship for His promises. May the Holy Spirit bless our meditation on His holy word!

#### CHEERFULLY OBEYING HIS COMMANDS

None of us enjoys being told what to do. Whether we are 2, 22, 42, or 82 - we don't like being told what to do. We may obey, but rarely do we consider it a joy to obey. We don't like being told we can only drive so many miles per hour. We may do it, but we want to go faster. Or we don't like being told we have to fasten our seatbelt in the car. We may do that too, but we don't like being told it is the law and we have to buckle-up. In each one of us is a sinful old man that is selfish and wants to be its own boss. Our old man is kind of like a three year old in the grocery store who lays down on the floor kicking and screaming because mom told him to do something he doesn't want to do. We may hide it better as we get older, but our old man feels the same way about being told what to do.

That is what makes the events in our text so remarkable. Here we have a command from God that Abram seems to cheerfully obey. Listen again to what the LORD said to him, ***"Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you."*** What is the LORD telling Abram to do? He's commanding him to leave everything he knows and is familiar with, and journey into the great unknown - to a foreign and unknown land. The LORD is asking Abram to blindly follow Him in faith and trust Him.

Imagine the LORD saying this to you! Imagine if the LORD asked you to pack up all your belongings and get on an airplane to an unknown destination. Leave behind your parents, most of your relatives, your friends, your hometown, your state, and even the country that you had grown up in. What a command!

Yet how did Abram respond to this command from the LORD? Did he lay down on the dirt floor, kicking and screaming, saying "I don't wanna! I won't! I won't!" What do we read this 75 year old man did in verse 4? ***"So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him."*** God said it, Abram did it. Abram took up his wife, his nephew Lot, boxed up their possessions, gathered all his servants, and left for Canaan. Canaan, a land hundreds of miles away, a place Abram had likely never been, and a place where the people likely spoke a different language.

This is faith at work, isn't it. This is that child-like faith which takes God at His word. Abram doesn't question, "Where will I live? Where will my livestock feed? What will I do when I get there?" Faith doesn't question the word of God, but simply trusts it and obeys. This is what the psalmist wrote in Psalm 112, ***"Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who delights greatly in His commandments."*** This is faith which is willing to leave everything behind that it

knows, and cheerfully obeys the commands of God.

Now the LORD hasn't asked us to leave the Dakotas and move to a foreign country. But the LORD has given us similar commands to leave behind all that we know and follow Him. Leave behind the world and its empty pleasures. The world tells us that we need to take care of ourselves first, our needs, our wants, our desires, and everything else comes second. Jesus says, ***"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."*** (Lk 9:23)

How do we respond to denying ourselves, denying our fleshly desires, and following Jesus? Well our sinful flesh doesn't like it, but our faith does it cheerfully! The new man of faith which the Holy Spirit has created in us DELIGHTS to do the will of God, just as Abram and the psalmist did. Likewise Jesus has promised be with us as we journey through the valley of the shadow of death. He has called us to follow Him to a land that He will show us. None of us have seen the Promised Land of heaven, yet faith cheerfully follows Jesus, trusting His Word with that child-like faith. In faith we seek to deny ourselves, and follow only Jesus.

#### WORSHIPING HIM FOR HIS PROMISES

We teach our confirmation students that throughout Scripture there are two main doctrines or teachings - Law and Gospel. Law is anything God tells us to do or not do something. The 10 Commandments are law. We would say that the LORD's command to Abram to leave his father's house was law. The Gospel, on the other hand, is a promise from God that He will do something. A promise to bless. A promise to save. The Gospel is the good news about Jesus doing everything necessary for us to go to heaven.

So as we return to the LORD speaking to father Abram in our text, what do we find in verse 2 and 3 of our text? ***"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*** And then again in verse 7, ***"To your descendants I will give this land."*** So, Law or Gospel? Gospel! The LORD tells Abram I WILL do these things for you. I WILL make you a great nation. I WILL bless you and make your name great and you shall be a blessing. This is the LORD promising to do great things for Abram out of His undeserved love.

The LORD did indeed make a great nation out of Abram. From Abram's lineage would come the great nation of Israel. The LORD did indeed make Abram's name great, didn't He. People today of many different religions admire Abram as a great man of faith. The LORD did indeed bless Abram and make him to be a blessing - a blessing for all the people of the earth. This was the LORD promising that from Abram's descendants Jesus would eventually come. Jesus who is the Savior of not just the physical descendants of Abram, but of all the families of the earth. Abram's descendant, Jesus, is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Abram's son, Jesus, would be his Savior as well - and in this way Abram would be greatly blessed!

But how many of these things would Abram see in his lifetime? When Abraham died, his son Isaac had only two sons, Esau and Jacob. It wouldn't be for many centuries after Abraham's death that a great nation would rise from his offspring. And it would be centuries before his descendants would take possession of Canaan and form the nation of Israel. Abraham certainly did not live to see how all the families of the earth would be blessed in him.

Though Abram saw very few of these things come to be, that didn't stop him from believing they were true. And how do we know? Well we see the fruits of his faith once again, don't we! Wherever Abram settled, there he would build an altar to worship the LORD God. When Moses writes in verse 8 that Abram, **"called on the name of the LORD,"** that means he worshiped and prayed to him. No longer did Abram worship false idols, but the LORD God was now his God and the only God he worshiped.

In this life, like Abraham, we do not always see the blessings God promises us. So often our eyes seem to be telling us a different story than what our hearts believe. Most often what we do see with our eyes are the crosses that come with following Christ. The Apostle Paul encouraged the suffering believers in Asia-minor, **"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."** (Acts 14:22) Just as Jesus endured much shame and persecution, we should expect the same when we deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him. Our suffering is not to pay off our sins, because Jesus already completed that payment when He announced, "It is finished," from the cross. Our crosses are the cost of discipleship.

But the LORD God has made just as many precious Gospel promises to us, hasn't He! We haven't seen Jesus face to face, but we believe in Him and love Him as our Savior. We didn't see Jesus die on the cross, yet we believe that He was sacrificed to purchase our forgiveness. We've never seen someone who was raised from the dead, yet we believe Jesus rose on the third day and we believe that we too will rise from the dead on the last day. We haven't seen heaven, yet we know the dwelling place of God exists and because of all that our Savior Jesus did, we too will inherit and enjoy the bliss of eternal life with Him in heaven. As Paul wrote, **"We walk by faith, not by sight."** (2 Cor 5:7)

And though unseen, we worship the God who loved us and saved us. He has given us faith in Him, faith which exercises itself in worship. We call upon His name as we praise Him, pray to Him, and give Him thanks. And not just on Sundays and Wednesdays. Just as Abram built an altar to the LORD wherever he moved, so too wherever we go, we worship our Savior God in our daily lives. Paul writes in Romans 12:1, **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."** Faith responds to the promises of God by worshiping Him.

So, you see, we do have a great deal in common with Abraham. We worship the same Triune God. Though Abraham looked ahead to a Savior yet to be born and we look back at Jesus who already lived, suffered, and died for us - we both believe in the same Savior. Through the faith God gave both Abraham and us, we gladly obey the commandments which He speaks. And our faith responds to the promises of God by worshiping Him for His goodness and grace. May God ever continue to work in us, as He worked in our father Abraham, to keep us steadfast in this faith unto eternal life. Amen.