



Lent 2-February 28, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16, Romans 4:13-25, Mark 8:31-38

"It Depends on Faith"

- Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Dear friends in Christ, Grace, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

There are so many stories in Genesis about the faith of the great patriarch Abraham. His faith is also referenced in many places in the New Testament as you heard from Paul from the second lesson for today. The writer of Hebrews also declares the faithfulness of Abraham. Peter is the main disciple in the gospel reading for today and his stories are also found on many other pages in the New Testament. Today, however, we only get a snapshot of each of these biblical characters in their brief stories that we hear today. As I read the second lesson from Romans earlier this week as I started preparing for today and specifically where Paul said about Abraham, "He did not waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.", I was reminded of some funeral sermons I have listened to over the years when I wondered if the preacher was referring to the same person that I once knew.

When I read these words, I wondered who Paul was really talking about when he wrote "He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise?" I doubted if he was really talking about Abraham, because we are familiar with the other Abraham stories when he wasn't so faithful. That's what I meant by what I have heard at some funerals after the pastor has praised the deceased for all his/her good works in this life and then maybe others are invited to get a chance to come to the microphone to express the good things they remembered, some of us sitting in the pews know other stories about these people which don't always line up with what is being said at the funeral.

Nobody is stepping up to the microphone to praise Peter as we hear in the gospel for today. He not only isn't getting praised, but he is given the name of Satan by Jesus and is told to get behind Jesus. This sounds much different when Jesus first called Peter and was told to "Follow Me." But again, we are reminded that this is just one of the stories about Peter in the bible. In fact, Peter's greatest moment in scripture had just taken place before this reading. I regret that I didn't ask Jodee to include more of Peter's story in the bulletin for today so you could have heard this great contrast between these two events in Peter's life. You only must back up two verses to hear Jesus commend Peter for his confession that Jesus was the Messiah. It only took a short time for Peter's fame and faith to quickly fade.

Abraham's faith on the other hand took many years to reach a point so that Paul would one day record in Romans, "Abraham's faith did not waver in unbelief at God's promise. Maybe it's my sinful nature rearing its head to remember when Abraham and Peter were not demonstrating faithfulness to God rather than times when they did just as we all often do when we think about people we know.

The first lesson for today takes place later in the life of Abraham. We learn that he was 99 years old when God was speaking to him at this time and giving him the promise that he would make him exceed numerous, he would become an ancestor of many nations, he would give him the ability to be exceedingly fruitful at his old age, and that from his descendant's kings would even be born. But this was not the first time Abraham heard this promise. Abraham was 24 years younger when the Lord first spoke to him about becoming the father of many nations. Abraham even had a different name when God first delivered this same promise. Even though Abram was 75 and not 99 at this time, the idea was literally inconceivable. If it wasn't hard enough for Abram to believe that he would start fathering children in his old age, Sarah, his wife in her old age also laughed at the idea. Even when the Lord told Abram directly to look up in the sky at night and try to count the stars because that's how numerous his offspring would be, Abram at that time indeed wavered in faith unlike what we heard Paul write in the second lesson for today. It was then Abram and Sarai conceived their own plan to become parents by Sarai giving Abram her servant Hagar to bear them a son named Ishmael.

Abram did waver in his faith on other occasions in his life, that is until the story you heard today when he was 99 years old. Abram and Sarai's laughing stopped when the promise was given by the Lord again when he changed their names to Abraham and Sarah. Abram did not waver when he heard the Lord speak again and bless Sarah and said that kings of people would come from her and no one else. God's promise that he would bless Abraham and Sarah with a child named Isaac came true just like every promise from God does.

As we turn to other stories of Peter, we know that the Lord had not given up on Peter even though we heard Jesus call him Satan in today's reading. The Lord's plan for Peter was to be a disciple and not even Peter's rebuking could change what the Lord had promised for Peter. The Lord did for Peter just as he did for Abraham. He told him of the promise that he had for him again and again until unbelief was replaced with unwavering faith.

*The Apostle Paul said, "**It depends on faith**, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham for he is the father of us all."*

*It takes faith to not be ashamed of Jesus and what he says. The plans Jesus has for you and your salvation don't always make sense to us. Our reasoning will not make sense of God's plans. **It depends on faith**. Jesus wasn't asking for Peter to make sense out of his plan for our salvation when he said that the son of man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priest, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Peter was willing to recognize Jesus as a savior, but he rejected and openly rebuked Jesus and his plan that this would happen through suffering and death. Either Peter had a different plan for what he thought Jesus should do instead of dying for us to save us or else Peter had an idea of what he could*

do to help Jesus so that he didn't have to suffer. Whatever was on the mind of Peter would not change the way God's promise of salvation would be delivered to you.

*On this second Sunday in Lent, we heard how two people Abraham and Peter who seem to be in two very different places regarding their faith. Abraham who first questioned God's promise and after many years of hearing God's promise to him reached a point when he no longer wavered at unbelief. And we also heard about Peter who went from confessing Jesus as his savior to rebuking him in a short period of time. Maybe it is good for you to know today that it doesn't matter if you think your faith is as strong as you heard Abraham's was in this story when **he did not waver in unbelief** or if you think your faith is as absent as it was for Peter when Jesus said **get behind me Satan**, God is not done delivering promises to you. God does not limit the number of times of repeating blessings to you any more than the times that he will forgive your sins. You represent one of the stars that the Lord pointed to in the sky when he told Abraham that he would be blessed.*

You have been blessed and have received faith again today by hearing the unfailing promise the Lord has for you. Amen.