

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who is our Blessed Assurance, Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

We're into our second week of our journey through the great and epic stories of the Bible. This week we take a stop to visit the Abraham saga. It's fitting that we would make Abraham our second stop on our journey. Obviously, the Creation and Fall had to be the first stop, but now we're here, with the man whom God chose to be the father of many nations. Wait, what? Abraham is the one God chose, Why? Well we'll have to ask God that one day when we get to see God face to face. Only God knows why God chooses someone over anyone else. What I can tell you is God chose Abraham, an exceedingly rich man who owned slaves to be blessed. I can also tell you Abraham and all his descendants were blessed in order to be a blessing to all nations. That was God's covenant with Abraham from the beginning and God made that same promise to Abraham on 3 separate occasions. What else do we know about Abraham and this covenant with God?

We know that three of the world's greatest religions call Abraham the Father of their faith. Father Abraham is the father of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Religions. Through Abraham's son Isaac, all the way through the birth of Jesus, who is called The Christ, both Christianity and Judaism call Abraham father. Through Abraham's other offspring, Ismael, the Islamic religion traces its roots.

For us, as Lutheran Christians, our ears perk up when we hear the last line in our text for this week, “⁶And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.” That line is important for us because it leads directly into our doctrine of Salvation by Grace, through Faith. The most quintessential Lutheran understanding and the lens through which we read all of scripture.

Saint Paul also took notice of this verse from Genesis. In his letter to the Roman Church, he wrote that when God reckoned Abraham's belief in the promise of the gift of many descendants as righteousness, it was pure gift. Paul says one doesn't have to work for a gift, you work to receive wages, but God gave Abraham this promise as a gift. Today, we call that gift, grace, and the belief of Abraham, we call that faith. Abraham trusted the promise of God that his offspring would be more numerous than the stars in the night sky even though he died, never having realized that promise. All Abraham had when he died was Isaac, and an illegitimate son called Ishmael.

Here's another thing I can say with confidence about Abraham and his story, Abraham's faith wasn't perfect. Abraham doubted. Abraham tried to do things his own way. Abraham was just as human and fallible as you or I. Did you know there were 25 years separating the first time God called to Abraham and promised to make him the father of many nations? He was 75 years old when God made the first promise and Isaac was born when he was 100.

As most of you know about me, I hate waiting. I get annoyed standing in checkout lines at the grocery store and really frustrated when I get behind a slow moving driver on the freeway. I can't imagine how hard it would have been for poor OLD Abraham to wait 25 years for his first born, especially considering his advanced age and the fact that the Bible says Sara was barren and as good as dead... Is it any wonder Sara would force her handmaid, Haggar, into Abraham's bed, thinking the much younger and beautiful Haggar could be the means through which God would give a son to Abraham? That wasn't God's plan for Abraham nor was it God's plan to begin creating the Chosen people.

If such a great man as Abraham can have long periods of doubt and even take matters into his own hands, how much more do we, who are 3500 years removed from Abraham and his belief in God's promises, suffer from doubt and lack of faith in those same promises. I mean it's been almost 2000 years since Jesus promised to return and reconcile all things to God. Where is he and what's taking so long? As I look around the world today, I see a world more than ready and certainly in need of a Savior to right all the wrongs and lead us into God's way of peace and justice. Considering that impatience is a fairly common human trait, it's no surprise when some people try to take matters into their own hands. The Zionists, for example, believe that sparking an apocalyptic war in the Middle East will cause Jesus to return. There have been other groups like the Branch Davidians

who waited for the return of Jesus only to end up dying in the massacre in Waco Texas several years ago. Other cultic groups have gone the same way. If you Google "Second Coming of Jesus," in less than 1 second Google gives you over 141 million hits. Even after all this time there's still great interest in God's promises.

Given our propensity to lose faith and try to do things our own way when the promise takes so long to be fulfilled, what can, and should we be doing in the meantime? God gave Abraham the sign of the covenant so the Jewish people could cling to something as they waited. Circumcision was their sign. We have been given two signs to help us remember God's promises to us. The Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are what we do in order to remember God's promises to us. We receive God's gift of Baptism once, forever receiving adoption into God's family and given the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. Yet, we, like Father Abraham, get impatient. We stray, we doubt, and we try to do things our own way. We need to be reminded that we belong to God and have been purchased by the precious blood of our Savior, Jesus. That's why Jesus instituted the second Sacrament of Holy Communion, because we need to be reminded, we need to be reassured God's promise is still true and it's still true for you and for me. Now, some of us are a little more patient than others. Some might only need that reassurance once a year, some once a quarter, some once a month. Others of

us are less patient. Some might need that reassuring reminder weekly. There are times in my life when I needed to be reminded that I am loved and covered by God's grace every single day. That's one reason why our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters offer the Sacrament of Holy Communion every single day. I can't say who often you might need to be comforted and reassured of God's continued love and care, but I will let you know that when we get over this corona virus, I plan to go back to offering Communion as we did before the pandemic hit. I also give fair warning that I will continue to preach and teach that we all need this great gift of God as often as we gather in His Name and my prayer is that someday, everyone will come to know what great benefit the Sacrament gives and you will all be demanding me to offer it at every worship service. To quote Martin Luther, "If you knew how many darts the devil was shooting at you every day, you would run to the Sacrament of the Altar every chance you got!"

For now, we have an opportunity to simply rest in the promise of God even while we can't all receive God's reassuring Sacrament as often as we truly need it. It's hard to live in the "Meantime," where we already have God's promise of forever forgiveness and eternal life, but God's Kingdom hasn't fully arrived. In this meantime, what are we to do? Well, for one, we wait. We wait for Jesus to return as He promised. We also pray. We pray for peace, for justice, and for Jesus to return. In the meantime, we also remember and listen. Hearing God's Word in

all its forms helps us to stay the course as we wait for God to fulfill God's promises.

May God's promise to Abraham and God's promise to each of us be fulfilled for us today. Thanks be to God that God reckoned Abraham's faith as righteousness and God still reckons our faith, even if it *is* as tiny as a mustard seed, as righteousness today. May God give us the patience to faithfully wait in this "meanwhile time" for Jesus to come again. When Jesus does come, may you be found already a full citizen of the Kingdom of God on earth, living out the faith you inherited from our father Abraham, amen.