

## **Where Are We Going?**

**March 8, 2020**

**Sermon Series “Questions of Lent”**

**Second in a Series of Seven**

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**Genesis 12:1 - Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”**

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

Last week we began a series of Lenten Sunday sermons with the theme, “Questions of Lent.” In last Sunday’s sermon, we saw God coming and looking and seeking out Adam and Eve with his first three recorded questions addressed to Adam - “Where are you? Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? And then a question for Eve “What is this you have done?”

Today, we find God asking a well to do cattleman to pull up stakes, to load up family and animals and leave familiar surroundings and go to a land unknown. We can imagine his wife and family and friends asking the 64,000 question, “Where are we going?” And we only speculate on how Abram answered. We know from chapter 11 that his father Terah’s ultimate destination had been to get to Canaan, but when they reached the land of Haran, they settled there. Perhaps Abram answered that “that’s a great question, and I have no idea how to reply.” Perhaps he answered, “I wish I knew” or “I’ve been staying awake at night trying to figure it out” or “I’ve been praying about it but God is silent” or perhaps he gave the best answer of all, “We’re just going to have to trust God on this one!”

Whereas on the one hand Abram’s loved ones were no doubt asking “where are we going?” or perhaps on the journey there were travelers asking the question every parent loves to hear on a long road trip, “how much farther?” On the other hand, God was in effect asking Abram, and by extension He is asking us today, “Will you trust me?”

Abraham and his family get a lot of press in the book of Genesis. No less than 12 chapters are devoted to him and Sarah, their son Isaac and Rebekah, their grandsons Esau and Jacob, and their twelve great- grandsons who eventually would be known as the 12 tribes of Israel. We learn at least two truths about the way that God takes his people by the hand and leads them. #1 we learn that he finds it necessary to test us along the way. And #2 we learn that God’s preferred method for leading us along the way is by way of His promises.

I read a story about a man who took his girlfriend out for dinner, and when they sat down, he laid an elaborate box on the table for her birthday. All the while they were eating, she wondered about the box, it was a big box, and her mind raced to know what was inside. Finally dinner was over, and he said she could open the box. Inside was a pillow. She said, “oh, wow it’s a pillow. It’s a nice pillow. Thank you.” She turned the pillow over thinking something was attached to the pillow, but nothing. “Thank you so much. It’s really a nice

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pillow.” At which point he took the pillow from her, he laid the pillow on the floor, he got down on one knee, he took her by the hand, and asked her to marry him. At that point the one who gave her the pillow became much more important to her than the pillow itself.

This story invites us to learn once again that the Giver of all good gifts is so much more important than the good gifts themselves. As we go through all the ups and downs of life, Jesus would invite us to fix our eyes on Him instead of all the ups and downs. As God takes us by the hand and tests us, He would hold huge promises out in front of us - as a way of leading us.

**Two parts to our sermon today - first we explore three of God’s specific promises to Abraham, and secondly, three of God’s specific promises to us.**

### Three promises to Abraham

**Promise #1 to Abraham is that God would give his descendents (land) *Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you...So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.*** We note that the journey wasn’t easy for Abram. It wasn’t easy to leave his household and go to a place unknown. Only his wife Sarah and his nephew and not the rest of his family went. It wasn’t easy when they found their way to Shechem in the land of Canaan and there were all kinds of people already inhabiting the land. It wasn’t easy as Abraham realized they would have to displace these people and actually the promise of land would be fulfilled not in his lifetime, but it would be given to his offspring. Life wasn’t easy when they ended up in Egypt and Abraham became convinced that he should pretend that Sarah was his sister and he somehow got the idea that if Pharaoh knew that beautiful Sarah was his wife and he concluded that he would be killed by Pharaoh, and so he lied.

It wasn’t at all easy when for the next 20 plus years he and Sarah remained unable to have a child. It wasn’t at all easy when God tested Abraham by insisting that he offer up his one and only son as a bloody sacrifice. And yet God holds out this huge promise of land in front of Abraham, we hear Abraham asking “Where are we going?” We hear God asking, “Will you trust me?” And we hear the Holy Spirit whispering, “Keep on putting one foot in front of the other.”

**Promise #2 to Abraham is that God would make of him a great (nation)*Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house and I will make of you a great nation...So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.*** Here God was promising that Abram would become the father of a new nation, the nation of Israel. Israel would be that nation which would be the cradle of the Savior. Here we see that the way God deals with Abram is

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the way that he deals with all Christians. We see God intervening in human history, and doing so with the miraculous. Christianity asks us to believe in the miraculous, and it does so without apology.

**Promise #3 to Abraham is that all nations would be blessed through his (Descendent) *Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house and I will bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.*** The best promise of all, of course, is the same promise God gave in Genesis 3, this past Sunday’s reading, the promise of a Savior. The family tree would keep growing long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It would continue through generations and include a virgin named Mary, who would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit, she would give birth to Jesus who would save his people from their sins.

In Abraham’s day, any Canaanites who heard and trusted the promises of the one true God would be forgiven for their sins. Just like anyone today who trusts in Jesus Christ and takes his hand through all of the testing and the trials of the journey, blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, blessed is the woman whose sin is covered, blessed is the person of all ages and stations in life against whom the Lord keeps no record of wrongs.

**Three promises to us as individuals and to St. Paul Lutheran collectively.**

**Promise #1 is that heaven is our (home).** As many of you know, when I was 14 years old, my 20 year old brother Curtis was killed in a one car accident, September 5, 1968, in the Sheyenne River near Kindred, North Dakota. As the years went on and God blessed me with a wonderful wife, as God blessed me with healthy children and grandchildren, as God blessed me with friends and a ministry that I enjoy almost all of the time, I often felt bad for Curtis who missed out on all of that. He missed out on marriage, he missed out on having kids and grandkids, he missed out on baptisms and confirmations and graduations and so many good times, and I felt bad for him. But as often as I remembered that he was already in the presence of Christ, that to depart and be with Christ is far better, that to die is gain, well, then I realized what I invite you all to remember today - the good old days have not passed us by, they are yet to come. We are in fact but strangers here, heaven is our home.

Even though we believe John 3:16 with all of our hearts, it is still true that it is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of God. So often when life gets hard, we hear ourselves asking “Where are we going? Are we almost there? We hear God asking, “Will you trust me?” And we hear the Holy Spirit whispering, “Keep on putting one foot in front of the other.”

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**Promise #2 is that we’re part of a large (family).** Paul verifies what it means to be in a large family called the Holy Christian Church when he writes to the Galatians, “ **Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.** Jesus verifies the same truth in Matthew 12 when he asks, “**Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?**” **49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”**

Many of you may well have come here this morning feeling a bit alone, perhaps unnoticed, even unloved. In 2017, the U.S. census reported that over 45% of adults over the age of 18 are single. That compares to 28% in 1960. Single folks, of course don’t have a corner of feeling alone and unappreciated. Some of us are putting in hours and effort nobody else seems to be seeing. Others of us may feel like our brand of Christianity is unloved in America.

But the promise of Jesus Christ is that He is with you always, even to the end of the age. He is with you, dear friends, not only in the preaching and teaching and remembering of God’s Word, He is with you not only in the waters of Baptism and in the eating and the drinking of our Lord’s Supper, He is with you in the fellowship of believers. As often as we cry with those who are crying and laugh with those who are laughing and listen to those who are pouring out their souls, Christ is with us. Here in the Church, our promise to one another is that we will weather the storms of life together. Do we do that perfectly? Of course not. But we go through all of the thick and thin, all of the for better and for worse as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, praying again and again to our Father, who is in fact in heaven.

**Promise #3 is that our enemies have been (defeated)** To Abraham, the promise was that God would bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him. To this very day, we can be sure that the enemies of our faith will be fierce. Enemy #1, The devil and his demons will be constantly on the attack. Enemy #2 Every morning we wake up with a sinful nature inclined towards selfishness, crabbiness, and worse. Enemy #3 The sinful world all around us is getting more irreverent and ungodly day after. And enemy #4 is death, the very wages of our sin and a foe each of us must face in our own time, and in our own set of circumstances.

The kingdom of God is like a medium sized church in a medium sized city who knows beyond a reasonable doubt that all of their spiritual enemies have been defeated at the cross by their Savior. More and more they understand that the Giver of all good gifts is so much more important than the good gifts. They have learned that in every one of their trials, God is in fact testing them, that they might be stronger. As often as God makes them wait, He is in fact helping them to be more patient. As often as life goes south, they trust that He has a plan. So often when life gets hard, you can hear them muttering, “really Lord, where are you and where are we going and are we almost there? If you listen closely, you can hear God

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answering, “Will you keep on trusting me? And we hear the Holy Spirit whispering, “Keep on putting one foot in front of the other.”  
Amen and amen.