

Trusting God

“Faulty Faith”

Genesis 12:10-20

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Over the next ten weeks we are considering the life of Abraham, this towering biblical figure claimed by Jews, Christians and Muslims as one of the most influential persons in the founding of these three world religions. For Christians, Abraham is the person called by God to begin the great drama of human salvation that is completed and fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the opening verse of Genesis 12, we are told, *“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your kindred and your father’s house . . .’* And Abram obeyed God and began a journey of faith, an adventure following a faithful God, and as we shall see, this journey is filled with “ups and downs”, victories and defeats. Bruce Feiler, a journalist and author of several best-selling books, including one on the life of Abraham writes, *“The text is so matter-of-fact it almost masks the significance: ‘Abram went forth as the Lord had commanded him.’ He does so silently, joining the covenant with his feet, not his words. Only now he walks with God. And by doing so, Abraham leaves an indelible set of footprints: He doesn’t believe in God; he believes God. He doesn’t ask for proof; he provides proof.* (Feiler, Abraham, p. 44), and for his obedience Abraham is commended in several of the Apostle Paul’s letters in the New Testament (especially Romans and Galatians).

When God called, Abraham; or Abram as we know him in our scripture this morning; responded. When God said “Go”, he went. When God promised to bless Abram with land and a large family, and said that all nations of the earth would be blessed through him, he packed up his extended family and hit the road, even though he didn’t know where he was going! This is the kind of faith, writes the author of Genesis, that God, *“credited . . . as righteousness”* (15:6).

So Abram arrived in Canaan, after a long and challenging journey from Haran, pitched a tent, built an altar to worship the God who had called him, and simply waited for the fulfillment of all that had been promised – a storybook ending! Well, not exactly! Our text this morning opens with the words, *“Now there was a famine in the land”*. Famines were not uncommon in the land of Palestine; we will encounter several famines in our reading of Genesis over the coming weeks.

The land of Palestine – then and today – depends on seasonal rainfall, which is inconsistent. On the other hand, Egypt’s water source comes from the Nile River and its more dependable cycle of annual flooding. And so Abram, fearing for his family’s survival, leads them to the border of Egypt. It’s a perfectly natural course of action. However, while going into Egypt may solve one issue – hunger – there is another challenge.

It begins with a request of Abram to Sarai that may have gone something like this, *“Sarai, you are a beautiful woman, and no doubt, Pharaoh will hear about your beauty, and he may have me killed so that he can take you into his harem. How about when we cross the border you say that you are my sister?” It’s just a little lie for a greater purpose, how about it?”*

Well, Abram will hardly win many votes for “husband of the year” with this move, and sure enough Sarai is taken into Pharaoh’s house, where things go from bad to worse. Abram’s deception is exposed and sent with his family back to the desert.

This is the story we have in our scripture this morning, but there is a “second story”, an underlying story. We need to remember the “God-side” of this story, not simply Abram’s side. What about the promises that God made, promises of a land, and nation and a blessing? Remember Genesis, and the entire Bible is not simply a record of historical figures in an ancient culture – it is the account of a faithful and gracious God who puts in place a plan for salvation, a plan that involves sending his only son to pay the penalty for sin – my sin and your sin!

Abram who begins so well and so faithful seems to take things into his own hands, at the border of Egypt. It’s as if fear replaces faith. There are two tests in Abram’s Egyptian experience. The first test is, “Will Abram continue to trust God’s promises when faced with a crisis? Is Abram’s faith only important

when things are ‘as they should be?’” And he doesn’t do so well on this test. He can’t quite see how God can keep him safe in the land of Egypt; after all doesn’t God know about the power of Pharaoh? Perhaps at this point Abram lived by the words written by Benjamin Franklin many centuries later, “*God helps those who help themselves*”. There are many who people believe this is a quote from the Bible – it isn’t!

But there is a second test – what about God? Will the Lord keep his promise? And the answer is yes, God can absolutely be counted on to keep his covenant, not because of Abram’s faith, but in spite of Abram’s faulty faith.

Well, what do we learn from this scripture today? We learn that God will accomplish his plan and purpose. God has a plan and it will be done, God’s will is one of the things we pray for every Sunday morning, “*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name, THY WILL BE DONE . . .*” Do we take this prayer seriously?

The second thing we learn from this text is a reminder that God invites us, as imperfect as we are (God doesn’t call the qualified, he qualifies the called) – to partner with him in the accomplishment of his plan, as he did Abram and countless others. And he does so even when our faith is faulty! When God entered into our world in the person of Jesus, he called others to follow him. Jesus began his public ministry with an invitation, “*Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people . . .*” (Matthew 4:19). As one commentator has expressed it, we are called “*not just as beneficiaries of grace, but as agents of grace, dispensers not collectors. We are not designed to be cisterns but aqueducts*” (Walton, The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis, p. 409). Followers of Jesus should be – and are – at the front of the relief effort for the victims of the earthquake in Haiti, not blaming the victims!

But we also learn from the experience of Abram that God knows our faith is not perfect, at times it’s weak, at times it’s faulty. We, like Abram, take things into our own hands; we, like Abram, don’t trust God fully, especially when we face a crisis. We want control; we want to do it our way.

One of the things that makes Abraham so appealing to me is that I find myself in him. Just over eleven years ago I was diagnosed with cancer, at a time when my job situation was very uncertain. On the very day that I completed service

as an Interim Pastor, without a new position, I received a call from my doctor's office, "*The doctor would like to talk to you about your biopsy.*"

"There was a famine in the land . . ." My faith was shaken, did I trust God completely, or only when life was good? I could preach a message of God's goodness and faithfulness to others, did I believe it myself? You know, I wasn't so sure. Well, I bear witness this morning to a very faithful God, who in Jesus Christ has called me, who loves me more than I can comprehend, to whom I belong. This is the faith in which we stand, this day and every day - thanks be to God!