

Proper 14, Year C, August 11, 2019¹

The Promises of Faith

May our lives be based on your promises and full of faith in you.
Amen

Do you remember over the last few weeks we have been reading about Abram in our Old Testament readings? His name isn't changed to Abraham until Genesis chapter 17 verse 5. This morning we have a reading which in its time frame precedes our previous readings so we need some context here and he is still called Abram. We are in the book of Genesis; the first book of the Old Testament and we still don't know where Abram came from so I thought it would be good to fill in the gaps.

Studying Scripture is a three-pronged event. One prong is to become familiar with how our faith is based in Scripture, another prong is understanding the historical, geographical, and cultural

¹ Genesis 15:1-6
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Luke 12:32-40

origins of our readings, and the third prong is how we apply what we are reading to our personal, spiritual lives. So, let's dive into some of Abram's history which is sort of sketchy. He shows up in Chapter 12 with no previous mention of him in Genesis. His father Terah was a descendant of one of Noah's sons. Noah and his sons certainly knew Jehovah because of building the ark and riding out the flood.

The family lived in Ur of the Chaldees which has been pinpointed in southern Iraq. There is disagreement among scholars as to the accuracy of this placement. If Abram knew of Jehovah before the reference in Genesis 12, there isn't a Biblical record of it. In Genesis 11:31, we find this verse: "Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, a village in southeast Turkey, they settled there."

In Chapter 12 verse 1 we read about Abram's first encounter with Jehovah: "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. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will

bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

I've left out some events, wars, the blessing of Abram by King Melchizedek who is thought of as a Christophany of Jesus by some scholars. This was a tribal area so there are tribal wars in which Abram was victorious.

We now come to our reading for today. The theme in these readings for today is God's promises and faith that come from believing in these promises. In the first sentence of Genesis 15 God comes to Abram in a vision in which He tells him not to be afraid because He (God) is his shield and his reward will be grand, this is one of the wonderful promises from God to Abram. But Abram is more worried about his lack of children and doesn't seem to hear God's promises. God reassures Abram that his nephew won't be his heir; a son from his own body will be his heir. God takes him outside and says: “look at the sky. Count the stars. Can you do it? Count your descendants! You're going to have a big family, Abram” (*The Message*, Genesis 15:5). The verses say Abram believed God but we know from later readings that he still had doubts. After all, he was in his nineties

and his wife Sarai was around the same age. All Jews trace their descent from Abram/Abraham.

Abram reminds me of my own doubts. Does he remind you of your own doubts? I believe that God will take care of me and I trust that...except when I don't. I'm willing to turn control of a situation in trust to God to see it to its end...except when I don't. I've gotten better over the years but I'm still capable of wanting to take control because I can do it better than God can! What must I be thinking? Like Abram, we are humans behaving in human ways until we finally see the truth of God's promises.

And some of this human behavior lingers throughout our lives. I still grieve my brother's suicide even when I can say I know he is free from his unbearable pain and deep anguish. I still question and I still want to say to our Savior, WHY did this have to happen? Why didn't he stay in therapy and taking Lithium? Why did he have to die?

This brings us naturally to the Epistle reading from Hebrews 11 known as the Faith Chapter. It starts out:" The fundamental fact of existence is that our trust in God, our faith, is the firm foundation

under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.

³“By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word, what we see created by what we don't see” (*The Message*, Hebrews 11:1–3).

By faith Abraham, he now has his new name, “by an act of faith he said yes to God's call to travel to an unknown place that would become his home...by faith barren Sarah, (she has her new name), was able to become pregnant, even as old as she was...That's how it happened that from these two elderly people God created a people now numbering in the millions” (ibid).

Even in the most difficult and trying of circumstances, even when our world is falling apart, even when we are in the middle of what we don't understand, even when our instinct is to cry out to God in anger, we are to cling by faith to the promises God has given us that he will protect us, care for us, love us, and bring us through this life journey through a strange land as he did for Abraham.

“Faith, the assurance of what we hope for and the certainty of what we do not see,” (Hebrews 11: 1, Berean Study Bible) we walk by faith, not by sight,” (II Cor. 5.7) are two of many verses in Scripture which underscore the principle point of our readings today. It is trusting in God’s promises that gives us faith and it is through faith that we trust in God’s promises.

I’d like to also read parts of the Luke 12 passage from our Gospel today in *The Message* translation which you know is a favorite translation of mine. ²⁹⁻³² “What I’m trying to do here says the author of Hebrews is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with *getting* so you can respond to God’s *giving*. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God–reality, God–initiative, God–provisions. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don’t be afraid of missing out. You’re my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself. The quote continues: “Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that can’t go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bank robbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on. It’s

obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being."

Luke tells us that we are to "be generous. Give to the poor." As a deacon, I cannot let this part of the lesson go by. You are already generous in your giving for our many projects where we help those in need and I thank you for your generosity. I want to remind you that this is an outcome of your faith and what the Lord expects of us because he has been so very generous with us, generous in his promises, generous in his blessings and generous in his love and care of us.

Psalm 33:20–22 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²⁰ Our soul waits for the LORD;

he is our help and shield.

²¹ Our heart is glad in him,

because we trust in his holy name.

²² Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,

even as we hope in you.

AMEN