

Second Sunday of Lent, Year A, March 8, 2020¹

May our trust in you grow and grow, we pray in the name of Jesus.

We are faced with a treasure trove of delicious ideas in our readings for today and they all have a common theme which is TRUST. Let's trace this theme as it shows up in each of our readings.

Imagine that you are living the good life in Haran, having travelled from the Ur of the Chaldeans which may have been a city in Iraq or it may have been a city in Turkey, historians are not sure. He traveled there with his father Terah, his nephew Lot, and his wife Sarai. Terah, the father was 205 years old and died in Haran.

So, imagine you are living the good life in Haran and God tells him: "Leave your country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you." Not only is he told to leave Haran, but God says: "I'll make you a great nation and bless you. I'll make you

¹ Genesis 12:1-6

Romans 4:1-5, 13-18

John 3:1-18

famous, you'll be a blessing...All the families of the Earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:1–3, *The Message*). What would your response have been? "You want me to do what? Are you kidding? I just bought a nice tent condo here and the sheep are all settled in in the guest bedroom."

We don't know if Abram said anything to the Lord; all we know is Abram was 75 and he took his wife and his nephew and all his possessions and people and set out for the land of Canaan and arrived safe and sound (ibid.vs4–6).

Can you imagine the amount of trust Abram had to answer this call? How well-known Jehovah was to these ancient people is not known. God had revealed himself to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, and the sons of Noah but according to the Biblical record Jehovah may not have been known to others as the Monotheistic God of the Israelites. Just reading the 1–12 chapter of Genesis leaves a lot of questions about how widely known was Jehovah.

Abram must have had a lot of questions himself about such a move but they are not found in this Genesis account. What do you think caused Abram to pack up and leave? If this happened today, he

might have been committed or thought to be eccentric. Can you picture yourself in this situation? It's an example of obedience to what we hear God telling us to do, to step out in faith. Lent is a good time to ask the question: Lord, what do you want me of me, what do you want me to do?

Our reading from Romans picks up some of these questions and tries to provide answers to them. Paul writes: "So how do we fit what we know of Abraham, our first father in the faith, into this new way of looking at things? If Abraham, by what he *did* for God, got God to approve him, he could certainly have taken credit for it. But the story we're given is a God-story, not an Abraham-story. What we read in Scripture is, "Abraham entered into what God was doing for him, and *that* was the turning point. He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own" (Romans 4:1-3, *The Message*).

What I begin to understand here is that God will enable us to do what he gives us to do if we trust him. Paul goes on to say: "This is why the fulfillment of God's promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way...Abraham is our faith father" (ibid. vs. 16). It's a

matter of trust. So, we come from Genesis into the New Testament to look again at the trusting God. There are more examples of the ancient people trusting God because of his promises and successfully completing the mission God gave them. What is known as the faith chapter 11 in the book of Hebrews tells us of some of them. For example: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Rehab, Gideon, David and Samuel to name a few. We must not forget the disciples and many believers who gave their lives because of their belief in the Son of God. The opening of Chapter 12 in Hebrews tells us “since we are surrounded by so a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame...”

The story of Abraham teaches us the importance of listening for God’s voice. We might not hear it if we aren’t paying attention. Sometimes we don’t hear it because we don’t want to. Or as it is in my case, I didn’t believe I was capable of doing what God asked me

to do. It took me 15 years to answer the call to the diaconate. I didn't trust myself when what I needed to do was trust God. If he called me, he will be faithful. "...the fulfillment of God's promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way...embracing him and what he does" (Romans 4:16. *The Message*).

And then there's Nicodemus. What do we make of Jesus and Nicodemus, and how does it fit in our theme of trust? Nicodemus, a pharisee, visited Jesus late at night. As a pharisee, he was a member of the ruling class in Israel and a daytime visit to Jesus may have been risky. Nicodemus confesses God must be in what Jesus is doing or he couldn't be doing what he is doing. Nicodemus is developing a trust in Jesus that God is in what Jesus is doing. Jesus talks to Nicodemus about being born again. Nicodemus misunderstands and questions how one can re-enters his mother's womb. No, says Jesus, what he means by born again is to be born of the Spirit of God, the wind of God that blew over the earth in creation meaning the Holy Spirit. Jesus says "you must be born from above, ...I am telling you of heavenly things...Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

(a reference to the crucifixion Jesus must suffer). This is so whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal live. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:1–17, *NRSV*, and *The Message*). The Message to Nicodemus is trust what you are seeing, trust in God, and trust in Him, Jesus.

So, how do we deal with this in Lent? Lent is a good time to re-assess our lives in Christ and our trust of God’s care for us.

Surprisingly, I have some suggestions. Unlike David Letterman’s list of ten items, these are in no particular order.

1. Take on a new ministry.
2. Reconcile with someone.
3. Deepen your faith.
4. Spend more time in God’s presence.
5. Take better care of God’s creation. I’m working on this one.
6. Give up a habit that is damaging to your health.
7. Stop taking his name in vain.

8. Be more charitable in your giving.

9. Witness to your neighbors, family, and friends.

10. Make a change in a prejudicial belief you have.

Can you do ten changes at once? Very unlikely! But you can ask God to help you select one and ask for help to be able to work on it.

God is faithful. You can trust him!

AMEN