

**Pentecost 9 C
2022**

Zion, Pembroke

Aug. 7,

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.
Amen

I am amazed by Abram's faith. When Abram was 75 years old, God said to him, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's household, and go to the land that I will show you." God promised to bless Abram in this new land, and make him into a great nation.

Abram did as God asked. He left with his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their possessions and their servants and traveled to the land of Canaan. After Abram and Sarai arrived in Canaan, God appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."

As a little aside, the end of Genesis 11 lists some genealogy from Shem (one of Noah's sons) to Abram. I will read one verse from that genealogy: "Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot (the son of Haran), and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and with them he set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. When they came to Haran, they settled there."

I am curious to know what prompted Abram's father Terah to leave his home and people in Ur and travel to the land of Canaan. Could it be that God had made the same promise to Abram's father - that he would become a great nation there? Or did God just plant the desire in Terah's mind to settle in Canaan.

We will never know; in any case, Terah traveled more than halfway, then settled in Haran. That is all we know about Abram's father, Terah; no mention of his faith. We know that he had 3 children: Abram, Nahor and Haran.

It is safe to say that if Abram had done as his father did, and traveled part way to Canaan and settle there, that would be the end of his story. There would be no Isaac, no Jacob or Esau, or any ancestors who became the nation of Israel. His story would have ended much like that of his father, except that Abram would have no children, no descendants to carry on his name.

The good news is that Abram did as God asked, and his story continues through 13 chapters in the book of Genesis. Abram's father got 3 paragraphs. All of that to say that obeying God makes a difference.

Now, to our First Reading. We don't have an exact time when this Reading occurs, but it is probably close to 10 years after Abram and Sarai arrived in the land of Canaan.

So let's assume that at least 8 or 9 years have gone by since God promised that they would become a great nation. Nothing has changed, no clear sign of this promise being fulfilled. In the midst of Abram's growing concern or fear, comes a word from God, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

Abram is not convinced. His only heir is the child of one of his servants. God renewed His promise that Abram and Sarai will have a son, then leads Abram outside and says that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Abram believed this promise, and God reckoned it as righteousness. Abram, who later was named Abraham, is an outstanding person, a person of great faith. God blessed Abraham and his great faith.

If our Reading continued a bit longer, we would see that God made a covenant with Abraham as a result of Abram believing the promise in our Reading.

Many Christians would like that covenant to be that God would reward our great faith by placing a hedge of protection around us. God would keep us healthy and safe; no tragedies, no bad news, just blessings, peace, love, good times, a life of sunshine and roses.

That is not the covenant or the life that God promises to us, His children. Because God knows that when life is good, we take God for granted and gradually drift away from Him.

Kind of like what has happened here in Canada from the 1950s until now. The people of Canada have been blessed with material goods. Compared to other nations, life has been good.

If we take a closer look at the life of Abraham, we see that he was very wealthy in livestock, silver, and gold. But his life was not all sunshine and roses. There were several famines, during which they had to live in Egypt.

Abraham had to wait 25 years in Canaan until Isaac was born. Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born; Sarah was 90. Not the age when one wants to have a child.

Abraham's faith was severely tested when God asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac, and Abraham obeyed. God intervened at the last minute and provided a ram as the sacrifice in place of Isaac.

Again, I have great admiration for Abraham and his faith. I am almost 75, the age when Abraham left his home and his people to travel to the land of Canaan. I have no desire to move to a new land.

If I were to move, my choice would be closer to Stittsville, where our children and grandchildren are. I love being a grandparent, but have no desire to go back to the sleepless nights of having a newborn or toddler.

Children are worth all of the time and effort, but I have been there, done that and have no desire to go through it again. I admire Abraham and Sarah for taking it on when they were 100 and 90.

The point is, Abraham did everything that God asked him to do. And as a result, he has a prominent place in the Bible, and his story is still being told today. His story has been told and retold for about 4000 years.

Abram's story begins with God calling him to leave his country and his people to go to a land that God will show him. That is the beginning of what we know about Abraham, but I am positive that is not the beginning of Abraham's relationship with God.

At the time of that call, Abraham already had great faith in God, so great that he didn't think twice about obeying God. We don't know any of the steps involved in the growth and development of Abram's faith. We only know that Abram consistently obeyed God. And that is all we need to know.

God is faithful. God honoured Abraham's obedience by entering into a covenant with Abraham. God fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham. Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac, who began the long line of descendants that became the nation of Israel.

Jesus was born out of that line of descendants.

Abraham's great faith led to a great legacy. That provides us with the opportunity to consider our legacy. Abraham is known as a person of great faith and great obedience to God.

I consider that the very best legacy to have. Great faith doesn't usually come from a vacuum; it doesn't usually happen overnight. For most of us, faith grows in steps and takes time. It grows out of our relationship with God.

And like any relationship, our relationship with God takes time and effort. Time regularly spent alone in God's presence, listening for His gentle words of wisdom and life; time spent reading and studying the Bible, being open to hearing God speak through the words that you read, and inviting the Holy Spirit to help you put what you read and learn into practice in your daily life.

It also involves spending time in prayer, telling God what is on your heart, and listening for what God wants to say to you.

And it involves time to worship, as we are this morning . All of that feeds and nourishes our faith, as does the bread and cup of communion, and the fellowship, support and encouragement of our church family.

My hope and my prayer on this day is that each and every one of us be known as people of great faith. Amen