

Abraham's Hope and Ours

2nd Sun. in Lent – 03/05/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Genesis 12:1-9 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 2a, [Yahweh promises Abram,] **“I will make of you a great nation...”**.

v. 3b, **“...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

Introduction

⌘ “A forlorn hope” is an old military term, used to describe a band of soldiers chosen to take the front in an assault against an enemy’s defended position. The assumption of “a forlorn hope” is that those soldiers are on a suicide mission.

→ These would be, for example, the first men to climb a scaling ladder against a fortified wall or the first to go through a city gate that has just been breached by a battering ram. The term comes from the Dutch, “verloren hoop”, which literally means “lost heap” because it is foregone conclusion that most members of the “forlorn hope” will be killed or wounded.

⌘ There’s a big difference though between this “forlorn hope,” a hopeless hope really, and the “hope against hope”. As we look at the life of Abram today, we see that God calls Abram to hope against hope. It’s the story of Abram’s faith. Here he is, a 75-year-old man, with a 65-year-old barren wife named Sarai, who against all hope, still believes the promise from God that he would become the father of many nations.

→ So it is for us believers today as well, because our hope, like Abram’s hope comes from a promise!

I. Hoping in a Promise leads into darkness

⌘ As we read through the pages of Holy Scripture, especially in the Old Testament, we see that God made very shocking and weighty promises to the patriarchs; the early fathers of the faith.

→ Today we see that He granted Abram a whole land and descendants as far as the eye could see. And He promised him that from among those descendants would come God’s promised blessing; a blessing who would redeem the world from the fall into sin and all of its disastrous effects.

→ All people would be blessed through Abram! Okay, that sounds great on the surface, but the problem is that God required Abram and all his posterity to actually believe these promises. And it wasn’t like God just made a promise that He then fulfilled in the next instant.

→ In this text, God promised Abram three things: 1st “I will make of you a great nation”; 2nd “I will bless you and make your name great”; and 3rd “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”.

⌘ To move forward in faith, God promised Abram a homeland of his own; asking him to leave Ur and then Haran to go to a place where Abram had no idea of the actual location. God never gave Abram the deed to this land that He promised. Abram only possessed this land by God’s promise. In fact Genesis 23:19, tells us that all Abram actually owned was a burial plot for himself and his household at “the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron)”. Basically all Abram had was burial insurance. Isn’t that great?!

→ Men, imagine asking your wife to pull up stakes and leave her home and family like Abram did to Sarai. I can actually relate to a point, because that is what I did to Mary Beth when I decided to go back to school and pursue becoming a pastor, but only to a point. I imagine the conversation went something like this: “Hey Honey, let’s go live somewhere else.” “Where are we going?” “Um, I don’t really know.” “Where will our home be?” “Well, I’m not sure.” “What will

our home look like?” “Actually, we haven’t got one yet, but God has promised us burial insurance. How about that?”

→ We know now that Abraham lived to an advanced age; fathering the son of the promise, Isaac, when he was almost 100 years old. But given what he said to his wife Sarai, it’s a wonder that he lived past that first conversation.

✘ Still, when God said, “Go,” Abram went, with neither a deed nor a map; taking Sarai with him. The point is that God expected Abram to believe, not on the basis of his sight, his feelings, any deeds, burial insurance, or any other earthly prop. God had simply spoken His promises. And since that was good enough for God, it was good enough for Abram!

→ You see, God both hid and revealed Himself at the same time in the Word of His promise. It was all there, because the mouth of the LORD had spoken it. The theology of the cross is the theology of the Word. He speaks. And you and I believe...right? Right!

✘ But at the same time, God permitted Abram to dangle; to live in a darkness so impenetrable that it often frustrated both Abram and Sarai. For years they failed to see how God would fulfill His promises to them. Sometimes in cowardice and unbelief they even schemed to help God fulfill his promises their way.

→ But despite their weakness, God would not, and could not go back on His promise to Abram. He required Abram to trust Him. And it was only when it was too late; too impossible; too hopeless according to any earthly way of reasoning, that God then brought His promise to its full fruition. St. Paul says in Romans 4:18 that Abraham “believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”

II. God fulfills the promise in which we hope

✘ Yes, all along, the Word of God still confronted Abram. To know God is to trust the Word of God even, and especially without any evidence of fulfillment. For in faith, when God says it...that does it! Abraham preached this to Isaac and Jacob, and Isaac and Jacob preached it to their own households. And since God never goes back on His promises, those same promises are intended for you and me, as our support in trouble, because, as 1 Peter 1:25 says, “the Word of the Lord remains forever” – no matter how impenetrable or dark our path; no matter how forlorn our hope appears to us in the moment.

✘ Still, how could Abram become the father of many nations? He was not able to be the father of one son, let alone many nations. He was landless, except for a burial plot. He had nowhere that was his own. He lived in God’s land, but only because the pagans allowed him to do so. Yet Yahweh’s promise in verse three was, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”. How do those things go together?

→ No earthly thinking will support this faith and confidence. Trusting in human reason will always lead us to despair of God’s goodness and blessing. All that our earthly thinking sees is sin and weakness. We see broken marriages; children born out of wedlock; and all manner of rebellion against God’s order. We see a weak and suffering ministry; a dwindling interest in the Christian faith across this entire country.

→ We watch and we know how the great people in the world live. It “makes sense” and it is attractive to us. They have a big house, nice car, and beautiful clothes. They live behind high walls. On the outside, they sure appear to be blessed by God. So, what makes us think we have the blessing of God? We have neither power, nor the deed to it. But this is exactly why we must trust in God. All He gave to Abraham was a word. Not riches, not a land, not a deed to the promised property, not even hope. So against hope he believed and therefore he had hope.

✘ Much of what you and I believe must be believed against hope as well. Why should God dwell here in our humble church? Why should this sin-filled pastor have the authority to forgive sins in Holy Absolution or to serve and administer the Supper of the Lord so that in our mouths we receive the true body and blood of Christ? Is there any man giving me that permission? Can I show that I have human authority to preach, teach, and forgive sins? Any authority I have is not from man, but only from God and His Word.

→ Verse 17 in our Epistle Reading says that Abraham “believed”, because it was the Word that the Lord had spoken to him. The voice of God’s promise is what assures us today that we are blessed and a blessing to the nations, through Abraham’s promised Seed, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

III. God gives hope to us in Christ

✘ But many people still say, “All of that was for the great man, Abraham. We don’t have that kind of status. How could we expect God to commune here at our table with us in this humble, earthly house built by human hands, as beautiful as it may be?” And yet, like Abraham, Jesus lived a landless existence. He even said that He had “nowhere to lay His head” (Lk. 9:58). Yet in His flesh He deigns to live right here among us. He freely gives Himself to us in the Word and under bread and wine for us Christians to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins. And He does so based solely on God’s promise just as it was for Abram.

✘ In Romans 4:23-24 Paul says, “But the words ‘it was counted to [Abraham as righteousness]’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.” Yes, God wants us to know this same thing; that He is willing to come down into our humble homes; into this little church where He treats us the same as He treated our father, Abraham.

→ Just when earthly thinking shows us that all is lost and hopeless; that we are defeated and on the verge of despair, God comes in Jesus to show us that He cares deeply for us! The one who raised Jesus from the dead has sent Jesus to bear our transgressions and to acquit us of all sin through His resurrection from the dead. He did it all for us!

→ Friends, it is only in faith that we believe that we are at the same table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yes, because God is the God of the living and not the dead, then we know that Abraham is also part of our faithful community right now. There are many congregations; yet there is only one body of Christ, of which both you and Abraham are a part. Just as Abraham had faith against all hope and followed God without knowing the destination, so we, too, by the power of God have received faith that trusts God to reckon us as righteous before Him, even though we don’t know all the details for tomorrow.

✘ And if God considers us righteous because of Christ, what then is excluded? Our transgressions and our sins! Paul says that our transgressions are handed over to Jesus.

→ Well, what does Jesus need of our sins? Does he desire to know and feel your wickedness and despair? He doesn’t desire them, but He takes them upon Himself all the same! Parents, think of the last time your son or daughter fell into great trouble, and had to come and confess to you what he/she had done. You dreaded to hear it. It tore at your heart to know of his foolishness; to see her suffering. Perhaps it was a teenage daughter who became pregnant without being married; or a son who lost his job through neglect and laziness. Maybe it was a child involved in some kind of harmful or illegal activity.

→ As much as it hurts you, it hurts God even more – to see and hear all of our sins. And just as we listen to the hurts and problems of our children, so God sees and listens to our hurts; to our problems; our sorrows and sins; our foolishness and wickedness. He listens as only a loving Father can.

→ But He goes where none of us can ever go. He takes on our sin, in the human flesh and blood of His Son Jesus purely for our sake. Isaiah 53:5 says, “He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.” My beloved Christian, these are the blessings that God promised to Abraham; the promise given to “all the families of the earth” ... which includes each and every one of you right now today!

Conclusion

✘ The season of Lent is a time of hope in the midst of hopelessness. Our heavenly Father sent His Son Jesus, on a journey to this earthly existence that is filled with sin. From an earthly perspective He possessed nothing.

→ And yet He is Himself everything; the greatest and only blessing for all nations, because He has given Himself to death for us all! And so we, in faith journey with Him to the cross.

→ Yet that is not our final destination, is it? No, according to the Father’s promise, we are still going on toward our final home. Even though we have no deed for it, we still believe against hope that heaven is our eternal home. Why? because God has promised it, just as He did to Abraham. Yes, our hope is Abraham’s hope...and it is ours in Jesus alone. Amen.