

February 28, 2021

Texts: Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16; Mark 8: 31-38

Title: "Living the Faith of Abraham"

Let me ask a question of those of you of a certain age: Did you ever look around at a group of your peers and wondered to yourself if you look as old as they do? I ask that because I heard of an older fellow who was sitting in the waiting room at a dentist's office. It was his first time to see this dentist. While he was waiting, he noticed a certificate hanging on a wall that stated the dentist's full name. Suddenly, he remembered that a nice looking young woman with that name had been in his high school class some 50 years ago.

Upon seeing the dentist, however, he said to himself, "This lady's way too old to have been my classmate." After she had examined his teeth, he mentioned his high school and asked if by chance she had gone to that school. "I sure did," she replied. "When did you graduate?" he asked. She answered, "In 1965. Why do you ask?" "You were in my class!" he exclaimed. She squinted her eyes and looked at him real closely and then asked, "What subject did you teach?"

Our lesson for today from the book of Genesis begins like this: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old...that's a ripe old age, isn't it? ...the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'"

Ninety-nine years old! But this wasn't the first time that God asked something from Abram or Abraham, as we know him. Now in Genesis 12, he was commanded by God to leave the country in which he was born and to go "to the land I will show you." Abraham believed God and he and his family went. That was the kind of faith Abraham had. And it was that faith that gave birth to the nation of Israel.

Now in today's passage, God challenges Abraham's faith with even more of a fantastic promise in that he and Sarah, his wife of only 89 years of age, will bear him a son. Now the next verse after our passage, verse 17 says that Abraham fell on his face laughing. "Can a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is 90 years old bear a child?" He questioned it as you and I would too, but nonetheless, he moved forward with faith. (the point to the passage is that Abraham said "yes" he moved forward with faith.)

As we consider Abraham's example, we see what faith really is. **It's a dynamic, forward looking relationship with God.** Faith isn't sitting on your hands waiting for God to perform a miracle for you. There's movement involved. It's a matter of achievement...a matter of reaching out for the miracle in obedience to God's commands.

Christ needs people today who will obey his instructions to love and to serve and to give. We are not simply to be passive spectators. We are to get into the game of

life as servants of God and servants with His church!

There are a good many Christians for whom faith is a cautious kind of a thing in which one seeks, first of all, not to ripple the waters. But that is faith in its least effective form. Faith at its best sees the risk and says “yes.” It involves moving out. It involves setting our eyes on a lofty goal. People with the faith of Abraham are the achievers in this world. They’re the ones who get it done, with God’s help.

But there’s a risk greater than any of the others. That is the leap of faith that Abraham took—a leap of faith in God. Sheila Cassidy in her book *Audacity to Believe* tells of a time in her life when she was in the nation of Chile during a time of revolution. She was arrested on trumped up charges that she had helped out a wounded revolutionary. She was arrested and held without trial in a detention camp.

She was finally found guilty of a minor infraction but still was held in the detention camp. She was given by a doctor a copy of the New Testament. Leafing through it, she came to that passage in Romans where Paul asks, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? No. In all of these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from

the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Sheila writes, “Incredibly, in the midst of fear and loneliness, I was filled with joy, for I knew without any vestige of doubt that God was with me, and that nothing they could do to me would change that.”

Perhaps you are a person who has always kept God at a distance—who has been reluctant to trust God with your life. Well, let me invite you to experience a new adventure, an adventure of a lifetime.

Faith isn't accepting a handful of propositions and saying “Oh yes, I believe. Now I'm bound for the promised land.” That's a pale imitation of the real thing. The real thing is when you open your heart to Christ and you seek to live courageously and victoriously for him in this world—staking everything you are and hope to be on his eternal purpose and promise—like Abraham hoping against hope that the message of an eternal covenant is true. That is real faith. That is the kind of faith that can turn a world upside down. Amen.