

“Abraham’s Faith”

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Luke 13:31-35

Abraham is considered the father of the Jewish nation. God called Abraham, who lived in Ur, Mesopotamia, to leave the place and go to the land which God would show him. God made a promise to Abraham; “I will cause you to become the father of a great nation.”

Abraham is also described in the New Testament as the father of our faith. By faith Abraham followed God’s call. He left Ur and travelled to Haran, north of Canaan, the land of promise. By faith Abraham tried to offer his only son of promise, Isaac, to God, for that’s what God asked him to do. God intervened in the process and gave him a sacrifice to offer to God.

Abraham is the father of the Jewish people and the people of faith. Was he perfect and blameless before God?

No, in many ways he was like us. From time to time he wasn’t sure if God would carry through God’s promise as he thought God would and tried to take things into his own hands. Not only once but at least twice, as recorded in the Old Testament, he tried to pursue his own plans to get his heir for his family lineage, which would lead him to be the father of a great nation.

In today’s Old Testament Lesson, we learn that Abram, who was not yet called “Abraham” at that time, tried to take the head of his household to be his heir. Later Abram accepted his wife, Sara’s plan, to have his heir through Sara’s servant.

Abram acted as a chicken too. When Abram and Sara journeyed to Egypt on the way to the land of promise, Abram was afraid that the Pharaoh would kill him if he had told him that Sara, a beautiful woman, was his wife. So he told a lie to the Pharaoh that Sara was his sister. To save his own life, he almost gave away his own wife to the Pharaoh.

Although he was not sure about God’s promises from time to time and made human mistakes, Abram, nonetheless, believed in God and trusted God as best as he could ...as we do.

When God Showed Abram that his descendants would be as many as the countless stars in the sky, he “trusted” the Lord.

Although he received God’s covenant that he would receive the land of promise, as we heard in today’s Old Testament Lesson, he was told beforehand that it would happen in a very long run, about 500 years later. God said to Abram, “You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, and they will be oppressed as slaves for four hundred years. (Where did it happen?) But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. (But you will die in peace, at a ripe old age.) After four generations your descendants will return here to this land.”

What can we learn from Abram and God’s promises? One of many we can learn is that God’s promises may not come through soon and may take a long time. What we are to do meanwhile is to hang in there and wait for God’s plan to prevail against all the trials and challenges with trust in God, as Abram did.

In his book, [Good to Great](#), Jim Collins, an American business consultant, examines a conversation he had with Admiral Jim Stockdale, who was the highest-ranking U.S. military officer in a prisoner-of-war camp in Hanoi during the Vietnam War. Stockdale was tortured many times during his eight years in captivity. In captivity, he was a leader among the other prisoners even though there was no sign or sense they would ever be released. Collins asked Stockdale how he managed to survive.

[Stockdale] replied: "I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."

"Who didn't make it out?"

"Oh that's easy," he said. "The optimists."

"The optimists? I don't understand," I said, now completely confused.

"The optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart." (Another long pause and more walking.) Then he turned to me and said, "This is the important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you cannot afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be" (Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why some Companies Make the Leap. . . and Others Don't*. New York: Harper Collins, 2001. 84-85).

For Stockdale, the optimist's hope was in being released, and that unrealized hope is what killed some of the prisoners. I call those optimists "ungrounded optimists." It was the ones who faced the brutal facts of their reality who gained strength to endure the imprisonment.

Abram was faced with some brutal facts about what his descendants would face --400 years of enslavement in Egypt and four more generations of waiting, but he believed that God's promises and plans would prevail in the end. This is not "ungrounded" optimism. It is optimism grounded on God—optimism which faces the hard reality and still does not give up and believes in God.

Abram was as human as we are ...and he showed us how we can be a people of faith. When trials and challenges of life make us feel uncertain that God is still with us, may we remember Abram, who looked to the future with faith in God, who will prevail. Amen.