

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

¹ After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” ² But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” ⁴ But the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” ⁵ He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶ And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

⁷ Then he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.” ⁸ But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” ⁹ He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

Early 20th century humorist Robert Benchley once proposed what he called “The Law of Distinction,” which goes something like this: “There are two kinds of people in the world: those who believe there are two kinds of people and those who don’t.” With this statement, Benchley has drawn the line in the sand that separates humanity into two groups. There is no gray area, it’s all black and white.

The implication for this statement is simple, drawing a line in the sand results in division. We have a tendency in the world to make many issues into an “us vs. them” competition. For example, there are those who believe we should have stricter gun laws vs. those who believe stricter gun laws violate their rights according to the second amendment. We witness an out of hand battle, at least in my opinion, between our leaders in Washington, the Democrats vs. the Republicans, on issues that will affect more people than those sitting in Washington making the decisions. This divide has taken hold in too great a way in our nation overall. There are opera lovers vs. country music lovers vs. rock music lovers vs. hip hop music lovers. There are the haves and the have nots. There’s good vs. evil. I could go on and on with examples, but I think you get the point.

We draw those lines in the sand, and attach to the different sides stereotypes and false assumptions resulting in brokenness of relationships. Taking a black vs. white stand on any issue can be a way of passing judgment on each other, and we are warned in the Bible that it is not our job to judge one another. In Matthew 7:1-5, we read that Jesus taught, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do

not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye;’ and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

We are not supposed to judge others, but God has no such limitations, and the story of Scripture is the story about how God is distinct from humans, but also a story about how God makes distinctions between those humans based on their responses to God. There are those who are faithful and those who are not.

The scripture from Genesis that Ann/Eunice read a few moments ago gives us an example of faithfulness through the story of Abraham. Abraham, we learn throughout his entire story, was a man faithful to God; but that’s not to say that he did not have those moments when his faith was challenged.

In Chapter 12 of Genesis, God tells 75-year-old Abram, which was his name until God changed it to Abraham later in time, to pack up all his things, his family, his workers, everything, and move out to a place where God would lead him. God promised Abram that if he was obedient, Abram would be blessed and become a great nation, and other nations would be blessed through his descendants.

Now, if Abram was to have any descendants God’s promise would need to include a miracle. Sarai, his wife was far beyond childbearing age, and had never been able to conceive. How would it be possible for Abram to have descendants if he did not have his own children. But we are not told that Abram questioned God about this. He just packed up and did as God instructed.

In Genesis 12:7 we find the entourage traveled quite some distance and God appeared to Abram again and said, “I will give this land before you to your children.” At that very spot then, Abram built an altar to God, but still did not question God about how he would have descendants if he had no children. God never did give Abram a timeline, God simply commanded Abram to take a risk, to step out in faith, into a future he could not see clearly.

The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall. Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us. Faithfulness requires a willingness to take risks for God.

With faith in God, Abram was obedient to God’s command. It was not without some difficulties along the way; even so he kept walking, to where he did not know yet. His trust in God to keep His promises carried Abram through the difficulties; although Abram still did not handle all of the difficulties they encountered wisely. Fortunately, God was forgiving along the way.

By the time we get to chapter fifteen of Genesis, we see that Abram’s beginning to have some second thoughts about whether God will keep His promises. Abram was doing his part by doing what God asked him to do, yet Abram and Sarai remained childless. He questioned God about this delay in Sarai bearing a child.

How did God respond to Abram’s questioning? God did not respond with immediate action or with enlightenment on a timeline. God simply reaffirms his promise to Abram. God directs Abram’s attention to the sky and challenges him to count the stars. God told Abram as he looked at the stars, “So shall your offspring be.” *This may be understood as God telling Abram that he would have lots and lots and lots of descendants. But God was making another point too.*

God was also making the point that if He could make all of those stars, God can still give Abram a son. God is that great! God can do anything!

So, once again, God does not give Abram a timeline for the fulfillment of his promise to Abram. In spite of this omission, Abram again believed and trusted God to keep his word. God credited Abram with being a righteous man, a man working out his relationship with God and in doing so, strengthened it. **Notice**, God was **not** saying Abram was a righteous man because he was doing everything perfectly and never had any doubts. He was righteous because, with faith, he worked on his relationship with God, one step at a time.

“We too can strengthen our relationship with God by trusting God. Our outward actions such as church attendance, prayer, and good deeds will not by themselves make us right with God. A right relationship is based on faith – the heartfelt inner confidence that God is who he says he is and does what he says he will do. Right actions will follow naturally as by-products.” (Life Application Bible)

Another sign of faithfulness is living with hope. God rewards those who live and serve within the tension of hopefulness. In this story the reward is not a prize earned, but a special recognition given to a faithful servant of God who performs bold or risky services. Abraham and Sarah were called to live their lives against barrenness. The “reward,” the land which they were to inherit, required them to live as creatures of hope in a situation of hopelessness, the situation of hopelessness being their current reality that they had no offspring at the current time to inherit the land God was giving them. That was a pretty big deal back then. Everyone counted on having offspring to whom they could pass on an inheritance.

God makes the distinction between those who are willing to take risks and serve him, all the while remaining hopeful about what will come; , and those who say, “forget it, things are not happening fast enough, and things are not going according to my plans, so forget it, I will do things my way and be satisfied quicker.” God rewards those serving with hope with a reward that is everlasting; while those who go it alone receive only a temporary good feeling that they essentially gave themselves.

A sign of faithfulness is trusting that God keeps all of his promises. God reaffirmed his promise with Abram in chapter 15. God told Abram to prepare things for a sort of “sealing the deal” ritual. No one is really sure of the significance of the animals used and the splitting of all the animals except the birds, but what we do understand is that through this ritual, God wants Abram to be assured that he will keep his promises to Abram , which God did indeed do.

There was one promise that God made and kept that has a huge impact on our lives. God promised the world that one day a Messiah would come to save us all and indeed God kept that promise, the Messiah did come in the man Jesus. It is because of him that we know more about God and about how God wants us to live. It is because of him and the unbelievable sacrifice of his life that he made for us, that we are saved from our own sin. Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit is the one person we can trust to help us be in that group that God knows as the faithful ones. That’s the group we all want to be in, isn’t it?

We all have been promised, also, that Jesus will one day return for God’s faithful children. We know not the year, day, or time. We don’t know whether it will happen as some huge world event or as a personal journey from this lifetime to the next. Brothers and sisters, we don’t need to know. All we need to know is that God keeps his promises, therefore we want to live faithfully, always working out our relationship with God, so that when the Lord fulfills his promise for each of us, we will be with him in his glory for all of eternity. St. Augustine once said, “Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of faith is to see what we believe.”

March 13, 2022 – “Two Kinds of People”

A television program preceding the 1988 Winter Olympics featured blind skiers being trained for slalom skiing, impossible as that sounds. Paired with sighted skiers, the blind skiers were taught on the flats how to make right and left turns. When that was mastered, they were taken to the slalom slope, where their sighted partners skied beside them shouting, "Left!" and "Right!" As they obeyed the commands, they were able to negotiate the course and cross the finish line, depending solely on the sighted skiers' word. It was either complete trust or catastrophe.

What a vivid picture of the Christian life! In this world, we are in reality blind about what course to take. We must rely solely on the Word of the only One who is truly sighted--God Himself. His Word gives us the direction we need to finish the course.

So, you see, there really are two kinds of people in the world, those who have faith and those who do not. But God is the only one who with certainty knows which group we are in. If we want to be in the group of the faithful ones like Abram, we need to be willing to take risks for God, we need to live with hope in our lives, we need to trust that God keeps all of his promises. This walk of faithfulness strengthens our relationship with God; and prepares us for the day when Jesus will return to take us home to spend eternity with our Almighty Creator. So, sisters and brothers, the question we are left to ponder is, which group are you in? May we all be able to answer confidently, the faithful ones. Amen.