

Sermon: March 8, 2009

Scripture: Genesis 17:1-7; Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

Sermon: "Abraham is my Grandfather... in Faith"

The scriptures are abundantly clear that it was Abraham and Sarah's faith that won them the promises of eternal life. Nothing they did, not the purity of their lives nor the adherence to any laws that won them God's promises. Paul reminds his readers of this when he reminds his readers that salvation comes by Grace through Faith. Jesus rebukes Peter because Peter did not have enough faith to accept the message that Jesus shared with his disciples concerning the death and resurrection which he, Jesus, was about to undergo. How important is our Faith to the way we live in the world and the way we react to all that is happening about us?

Call to Worship

The way of worship invites us:

"Give thanks, call on God's name."

We remember god's wonderful works

And our hearts rejoice in God's presence.

The way of the covenant beckons us:

"Walk blameless before your God."

God awakens our faith and trust

And calls forth righteousness.

The way of the cross summons us:

"Deny yourself and follow."

Christ challenges our complacency

And bids us risk all for the gospel.

Hymns: #474 O Splendor of God's Glory Bright

#383 My Faith Looks Up To Thee

#2181 We Need a Faith

Prayer of Confession:

We come to you, O God, an unfaithful people. We have sinned against you and done much that is evil in your sight. The shadows of sin dominate us, and our secret faults separate us from the light and knowledge of your presence. Have mercy on us, blot out our transgressions, forgive our iniquity, and remember our sin no more. Purge us and we will be clean, wash us and we will be purer than newfallen snow. Grant us, O God, a new and right Spirit. Amen.

Commission and Blessing

As we have met God in worship,

We go forth to encounter God in our work.

We depart as a covenant people

Whose highest loyalty is to Almighty God.
The cross of Christ goes before us into the world,
Reminding us of the cost of discipleship.
We face the realities of everyday life,
Intending to put God's purpose before our own gain.
The promise and presence of God's covenant
Go with you and strengthen our resolve.
Our hearts rejoice in God's wonderful works;
We will praise God in our words and deeds.
Amen. Amen.

For Worship Leader:

Call to Confession:

With trembling hearts, knowing that we seldom discern our own errors, we turn ourselves toward the Eternal One. Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation. Come to the One who takes no delight in burnt offerings, but accepts the sincere prayers of the penitent. Let us repent and believe.

Assurance of Forgiveness:

Jesus Christ, the source of our salvation, died for our sins, once for all, to put to death the trespasses in which we have been living and destroy the domination of evil among us. We have been reconciled to God, through Christ, and made partners in a new covenant. God is compassionate and merciful, granting us clean hearts and new life in Christ. Rejoice, open you lips, and let your mouths show forth the Creator's praise. Amen.

SERMON

In his lifetime Peter exhibited the best and the worst of Faith. Our passage from Mark for the morning is a biting example of Peter's lack of faith. Go back, if you will, to the first chapter of Mark and discover a Peter who at a moment's notice leaves his fishing nets and answers the call of Jesus to follow him and become a fisher of men. (Mark 1:16-17) By the third chapter of Mark, Jesus has designated 12 apostles and first on the list is Simon whom Jesus renamed Peter. In the fifth chapter of Mark, Jesus is confronted by Jairus, one of the rulers of the local synagogue, whose daughter is deathly ill. Jairus pleads for Jesus to come and heal his daughter. But before they can reach Jairus' home, news arrives that the girl has died. Jesus does not let this news deter him. He takes three of his disciples and continues on to the house of Jairus. Peter is first on that list of three, and Peter experiences the raising of that little girl from certain death.

Peter, along with the other eleven apostles, is sent out on a practice mission to the surrounding villages. Peter is present when Jesus feeds five thousand souls with five loaves and two fish and still had plenty left over. Peter watches from a battered boat in

stark amazement as Jesus walks on water and calms the wind and keeps their boat from floundering. Peter, along with the other apostles, listens as Jesus confounds the Pharisees with his knowledge and understanding of the Law of Moses. Surely Peter was present when the Syrophenician woman was healed of her demon and again he was there when the deaf/mute was healed. What do you think was happening to Peter's faith as he observed and even participated in these signs of God's Grace?

Finally, after much travel and many miracles and a great amount of conflict with the religious leaders of the day, Jesus asks his apostles point blank: Who do people say I am? After they give him all the scuttlebutt: John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets, Jesus asks them who they think he is: And guess who chimes in "You are the Christ". ?

That's right: Peter. You are the Christ shouts Peter! You are the Messiah for which all of Israel has been looking and longing. And we say to ourselves, WHAT A MAN OF FAITH THIS PETER IS. Peter gets it right. Peter sees the truth. Peter gets the vision. Thank God for Peter!

Well, if all of this points us toward the best of faith. Our passage for the morning points us toward the worst.

Jesus knows it is time to share with his disciples something that will shake their faith. Our passage begins:

He (Jesus) began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

It is so easy to have faith when things are rocking along and things are going well and the economy is strong and we are realizing some of the hopes and dreams that we have learned to expect in this life. Peter's faith was founded upon wonderful miracles and extraordinary happenings. No doubt, Peter, along with the other apostles, was beginning to imagine a new world for Israel. The Messiah had come.... The Romans would be expelled. The Temple would become the center of faithful religious life again. And the promises made to Abraham would be fulfilled. What a Faith!

Try to imagine in your minds the place that Peter had achieved among the Apostles. In a matter of a few short months, Peter had become a spokesman for the group. He had been selected by Jesus to be privy to some of the most intimate miracles. He had been chosen by Jesus to be a part of the inner group. When Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, he is expressing the feelings of the group. It was not just a declaration, it was a hope. A hope that was as deep and pervasive as the hope which all Israel held for the coming of the Messiah.

You are the Christ! The Greek word *kristos* is a translation of the Hebrew word Messiah which literally means: The Anointed One. So, when Peter blurts out: You are the Christ, he was claiming for Jesus the ancient prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Haggai and

Zechariah. This Messiah was not supposed to be persecuted and die. This long expected messiah was going to usher in a new age, an age of political and economic restoration. So when Peter hears Jesus' words about he cannot control himself, he takes Jesus aside in private and chastises him. Scripture uses the word "Rebuke".

It becomes abundantly clear that Peter's "Faith" is not founded upon an understanding of who and what Jesus was, but on a dream. And Jesus' response to Peter gives us a good definition of what true faith entails. Jesus turns away from Peter and speaks so the rest of the Apostles can hear. "Get behind me Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men!"

Theologians and Philosophers want to make Faith a complex and intricate matter. But Jesus sees Faith as very simple: **Faith is keeping the things of God in mind.** With all due respect to Peter, he was the product of his times. The longing for a Messiah had been building for hundreds of years, perhaps from the end of the Davidic Kings. By the time of Jesus of Nazareth, most folks within Judaism had bought into the ideal of the coming Messiah and had placed a great deal of emphasis on the Messiah coming like a military general who would defeat all enemies and reestablish the throne of David. That's how the mind of man worked. God had other plans and Jesus came to unveil these plans to God's people.

In another time, almost three centuries prior to Peter, God spoke to Abraham and Sara and promised that they would become a nation and that they would have a land to call their own. The fact that Abraham was about 99 years old and that Sara was beyond the years of childbearing. The simple matter is that Abraham and Sara believed God and it was attributed to them as faith. If you followed the dictates of man, it was impossible that Abraham and Sara would be the parents of a mighty nation. But, when you focus on the promises of God, it became possible. And that's what Faith is all about. Focusing on the things of God and not on the things of man.

I received word this week of the death of a member of my first church, New Providence. She was in her 90's. Immediately upon hearing of her death, I remembered the times she and her husband, Jim, would have Elaine and me over for a meal. She knew the hassle that other members of the church were giving me and she wanted me to know that I had her and her family's support. Many were the times that Ruth would say to me, "don't worry about them, you do what you feel God wants done at New Providence." Her faith in God's providence was pervasive, and even when she lost Jim she never wavered.

I'd like to say that "We live in a time when Faith is needed more than ever." But that would not be quite correct, would it. Faith is needed in every time. Every generation has had to face issues that have tested the faith of God's people. From Abraham to Peter, from Peter to the present, there has never been a time in the life of mankind when Faith hasn't been needed. How did our grandparents get through the Great Depression? How did our parents make it through World War II? How did our generation make it through the years of disruption and civil disobedience that marked the war in Vietnam, the civil

rights movement, the woman's rights movement? And now, we ask ourselves how in the world are we going to make it through this present disturbance?

This is a time for people of faith to step up and declare: "God is in control, we believe we will come through this bump in history and be stronger for it." I believe that is what Jesus meant when he told Peter: You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men. Too often we view the world and the bumps of life from man's point of vantage point. When our Faith should have us viewing things from God's perspective.

Where would Abraham and Sara be if they had been locked in to man's way of thinking?

Where would Noah have been if he had seen things only as man sees them?

Where would Joseph have been if he had understood his being sold as a slave in simple human terms?

Where would Moses have been if he had viewed the captivity of Israel from a human perspective?

Where would Isaiah have been if he had seen the captivity only in human terms?

Where would John the Baptist have been if he had seen Jesus as just another human?

But we have Abraham as our Grandparent in Faith. Ours is the responsibility of standing in the mainstream of history and saying, "God is in control and our Faith is not from man's perspective, but from God's.

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