

## SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 12:1-8; Romans 4:1-5,13-17; John 4:5-26

*“Walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had...”*

Some of us can imagine being seventy-five. Few of us, however, I think can imagine being seventy-five and having the Lord ask us to walk halfway around the known world to a foreign land to start over again. We might want a second opinion. We might have some questions, some input, perhaps, maybe even some better ideas, at least in our view.

Abraham can be a bit of an intimidating figure, especially when the glimpses we get of him are the moments like this, when he heeds the Lord’s call without a question, when he leaves his fatherland at the age of seventy-five, saying goodbye to family and lifelong friends, and sets out for the middle of nowhere on the other side of way too far away. If this is all we see of Abraham, with maybe his willingness to sacrifice Isaac for the Lord and his rescue of Lot from Sodom, we can’t help but be intimidated. The problem is, however, we aren’t really getting to know Abraham if that is all we get to know.

If you get the email devotions—I can never plug those and Bible class enough—you’ve been going through the Book of Genesis for quite a while now. You’ve gotten to know Abraham and his family. And you’ve learned that Abraham was doing the dysfunctional family thing before the dysfunctional family was supposedly cool. You’ve also noticed that while Abraham had some mountaintop moments of faith, he also had his valleys of second-guessing God’s plans and protection, of wondering what he had gotten himself into, where this whole thing was going to end up. His son with his maidservant, Ishmael, was living, breathing proof of that.

And that’s where St. Paul’s words come into the picture. He writes in the second lesson, for all those who might have caught the mountaintops but missed the valleys, who might think that Abraham had paved his way to the Promised Land with good works and gumdrops, and that they might, then, be able to do the same:

*What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.*

And trust me, you don’t want your wages, you want Christ’s righteousness, because your paycheck is waiting in hell, while His righteousness brings you to heaven.

When it comes down to the Promised Land, to heaven, to salvation, new life, forgiveness, it comes down to grace, God’s undeserved—yes, unearnable—love, received in no other way than through faith. God’s law may threaten the old man, the sinful flesh, like a beast, into half-hearted, begrudging, and shallow obedience, but God’s promises speak only to faith. If you want to stay out of jail, look to the law. If you want to get into heaven, look to the promise. If you want to earn a paycheck from your boss, work. If you want to receive salvation from your God, believe. In other words, St. Paul’s namely, *“That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace...”*

Let’s look at it a different way. Why did God call Abraham? It’s a good question, isn’t it? So why? I suppose for the same reason He called Moses, called David, Mary, Peter, and Paul. Why was that? He wanted to? Why? He loved them? Why? He just did.

Luther’s words in the explanation to the First Article of the Creed fit well here: *“All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.”*

And if you don’t believe me, read Genesis and listen to Abraham, listen to Moses in the books that follow, listen to David in the Psalms, to Mary in the *Maginificat*, to Peter in his epistles, to Paul in his. Listen to them and you’ll hear them give the same answer to that why: because God is good though I am

not, because He is kind and merciful, *slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness* (Exodus 34).

And if their testimony isn't enough, step into the Holy Gospel and ask the Samaritan woman at the well, because there we see how the same Lord, Jesus Christ, who called Abraham, who appeared to him at the oak of Moreh, operates when he calls men and women into His kingdom and service.

The woman came to the well around the sixth hour. The Jews reckoned hours from dawn, about six in the morning. This means the woman came at noon, the worst possible time, in the heat of the day. No one went to the well at that time. And that's why she went. She was embarrassed to see her neighbors, ashamed of her life, and wanted to be alone—to get her water and go. And, lo and behold, whom does she run into? God. Beware of wells and oak trees.

That's when things got weird. All of a sudden, this stranger, this Jew—and Jews did not talk to Samaritans—claimed He had better water than the well, living water, water that would well up in her like a spring unto eternal life. He was speaking about the gospel, the good news of His death and resurrection for sinners, of healing flowing from His wounds, but to her it seemed like nonsense—although, to be fair, that's how the gospel is supposed to sound to the unspiritual, to those whose ears have not yet been washed and opened by the Spirit.

But her interest was piqued. If this new water meant not having to go to the well ever again, to risk seeing her neighbors, to feel the shame she carried everywhere intensified when she saw another, she could use some. *“Sir, give me this water, so that I will not thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”*

*“Go, call your husband, and come here.”* Ow. She wanted the water to avoid confronting her sin, and now Jesus swung her sin at her like a bat. Pow, right upside her head came her transgressions. *“I have no husband,”* she most likely mumbled with downcast eyes. And Jesus followed with an uppercut of law, *“You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”*

And she did what we all are tempted to do when confronted with our wrongdoing. She changed the subject. But Jesus will have none of it. He answered her question, but didn't let her off the hook. He can't forgive what she won't confess, can't send away what she won't let go of, can't turn to the future eyes that won't lift their gaze from the past. And so He brought the conversation back round where it needed to come. *“I know the Messiah is coming,”* she said, *“When he comes, He will tell us all things.”* And Jesus let loose, *“I who speak to you am He.”*

And the story ended in faith. How do I know? Because a few paragraphs later her fellow villagers whom she'd then called unashamed in and of her Savior to meet Him told her, *“It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”*

And the Savior calls you. But He can't forgive what you won't confess, can't send away what you won't let go of, can't turn to the future eyes that won't lift their gaze from the past. And so He draws your sins out of you. He draws them out to hang them on the cross. And He lets loose, *“I who speak to you am He.”*

And you're not seventy-five—or maybe you are—but He calls you to start walking, nonetheless, to *“walk,”* in St. Paul's words, *“in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had”* (Romans 4), *to walk in the newness of life of the baptized* (Romans 6).

No, He does not call you to walk halfway around the known world. Rather, he calls you to walk where you are, to walk in the confidence of the redeemed in service to your Redeemer and your neighbor. And one day, when He calls you to your new home, to the eternal Promised Land, you will answer, and you will step through that door Christ made out of death and set foot on the blessed ground of your new fatherland, Jerusalem the golden, not a pilgrim, not a wanderer, not a foreigner, at least not any longer, but a member of the family, as one who is finally home. Amen.