

## **Second Sunday of Lent February 28, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ

One of my favorite hobbies is sewing. I love sewing because I love the process of seeing materials of fabric and thread transform into pillows, quilts, clothes, or whatever project I have going on at the time. Now, for me the hardest part of sewing is that I have to try out things all on my own. I rarely find patterns or instructional videos before I work on a project. This has led to many of my projects taking longer than they should, or not coming out properly.

For example, I've been guilty of going on a Project Runway binge. This show, where all these aspiring fashion designers compete by making new outfits each week, has become a favorite of mine. Seeing these designers make amazing outfits in a matter of hours leads me to think, "well if they can do that, there's no reason I can't at least try!" Rather than looking for dress patterns or YouTube tutorials, I just start measuring and making calculations to see if I can manipulate the fabric on my own. However, I've learned the hard way that it rarely works out. Just because I can see that it can be done, doesn't mean I have the full understanding of what it means to actually make it happen.

This is why I feel like I can really relate to Abraham. Throughout his story in Genesis, we see different scenarios where Abraham thinks he knows the right way to go about things, but sometimes it ends up that he just makes things harder for himself in the long run. The main theme of Abraham's story is God's consistent promise that Abraham will become a father to nations, that even in his old age God will provide him and Sarah with a son. He's reminded over and over of this promise. However, Abraham is never quite sure how this promise is going to come about, so he tries to take matters into his own hands, to learn the hard way.

Looking at their story from the beginning Abram and Sarai are this couple from Haran who are called by God, and God tells Abram will make a great nation of him and sends him to the land that this nation will inherit. This is just the start of their journey. We see them find new homes, they get new names as we see in our reading today, and we see how they learn what this promise really means for them.

After the call of Abraham and Sarah, we see that they have to flee to Egypt to escape famine. (If you read this story, you will see they are still Abram and Sarai at this point, but to help with consistency I will just refer to them as Abraham and Sarah). Rather than just be honest and admit that Sarah is his wife, Abraham tries to be sneaky and say she is his sister. He is afraid that he will be murdered, so he has to do what he can to survive. I'm sure at this point he remembers the covenant he has with God, and knows that there's no way it will be fulfilled if he is dead. However, by taking matters into his own hands, he still puts the promise in jeopardy. This is because this covenant isn't just for Abraham, it's for Sarah too. Later in the story, we learn that Abraham can have kids without her, but Sarah, and later Isaac, are a part of this promise as well. Pharaoh tries to take Sarah for his own, but before any real damage can happen, Pharaoh finds out they are really married. As punishment, Pharaoh kicks them out of Egypt. While this leaves Abraham and Sarah homeless, they still have their promise from God to keep them moving forward.

Now, even though Abraham messes up here, God still comes back to remind him of this promise. God reassures Abraham that God will give him offspring, and he hears about the great land they will inherit. But this big problem is, Abraham still doesn't have any children yet, and Abraham and Sarah are a little bit past their prime for starting a family.

That leads us to when Abraham and Sarah plot for him to have a child with Sarah's slave, Hagar. They still trust God's promise that they will have a child, so they believe this is the only way God's promise can be fulfilled. So, they go through with their plan that they believe to be a last resort, and then we have Ishmael. While Abraham now has a son, this is not what God

had in mind. We do know that a nation will come of Ishmael too, but we need to remember God is involving everyone in this promise, so Sarah must be a part of it too.

That leads us to our first reading for today. God reminds Abraham once again about this promise, and that the son needs to be between him and Sarah. Again, Abraham is concerned because of their ages, but he doesn't fight it. He has faith that God will still keep this promise, somehow.

After seeing all the different ways Abraham takes matter into his own hands, I feel like I can really relate to him. I can't resist meddling if there's a way I think I can "help," and sometimes helping actually does more harm than good. We all have ways we can be like that, especially when it comes to what God is calling us to do. We want to help, but we have to make it fit our expectations and our circumstances. We know we should feed the hungry, but we have to make sure our families are fed too. We know we should visit the sick, but in this day and age, we can't do anything to put our own health at risk, so we stay home. We know we should love our enemies, but some people have hurt us so badly there's no way to recover from that.

Now, these are all fair concerns. But we've seen, read, and heard that God calls us to love our enemies, to care for the sick, to feed the hungry, and to look out for the widow, orphan, and the alien, all those who are marginalized. Even in a perfect scenario, these are big problems for us to tackle. But then, we put in the fact that we as humans feel the need to protect ourselves first before anything. We are selfish and put ourselves first. We don't read that we should love our neighbors after we make sure we have everything taken care of for ourselves, but yet we have made that justification. By putting ourselves first, we actually become the enemy of God because we do what we want rather than what God wants. We are enslaved to sin because we are enslaved to our selfish nature.

But we remember in stories like the one we have today with Abraham, that we have a God who sticks with us, who doesn't give up on us. When we fall short, God steps up. In a time where so many people are sick and are suffering alone, we know that God is always with them. Even though we can't solve issues like hunger as individuals, the Holy Spirit works through us to not only create food pantries and soup kitchens to help feed our communities, but also inspires us to find new ways to combat the systems that keep the problem of hunger prevalent. When we feel like we can't possibly love our enemies, we know that they are still made in the image of God and are still loved by the same God. And that's good news for us because there are times where we can be another person's enemy, even God's enemy, and we can know that even then we are still loved.

We can also trust that God will always be there for us because of the covenant God made with us in baptism. We get to be a part of this nation, this family Abraham is promised. Abraham's family isn't just his blood, but it can include all of us, because of the blood of Christ. We get to have a savior who would die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. On top of that, our covenant is like every other covenant we see God make in the Bible – even when we fail, when we don't hold up our end of the bargain, God will always remain faithful.

But it doesn't just stop there, God is always working with and through us to bring about the Kingdom of God. God works through our faith and the Holy Spirit so that we can do all of these things we are called to do. God never gives up on us, even when our faith waivers, or even when we fail. We see that when we hear this story of Abraham. In this story he has already fallen short of what God expects of him, and will continue to fail, but God is still coming through with this promise. God does the same for us. So even when our faith waivers, or when we fail, we can be reminded of these promises we hear in scripture, we can use water to remember our own baptismal promises, and we can continue to have faith in those promises. Yet even then, when we can't fully atone for our own sinful nature, we have a God who sent Jesus who through his death and resurrection leaves no path for separation between us and God. Because we can have that relationship with God, because of our faith in that promise, we can continue get back up when we fall and continue to do the work of loving our neighbors.

So may we continue to be like Abraham, to have faith in these promises, and may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.  
Amen