

Seeds of Faith

2 Lent B

“But he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.” Romans 4:20

The children sing that familiar camp song, “Father Abraham” that reminds us that we are a part of a world-wide human family of races and creeds; all which claim Abraham as their spiritual father and Sarah as their spiritual mother. It makes the world a smaller place to live in when we hear that we share a common heritage and faith in one God.

The amazing truth is that today we are members of the great progeny of Abraham. Through the waters of baptism, God has adopted us into the covenant as children of Abraham. Though times are different now than in the ancient land of Canaan, we share the faith of Abraham. We are part of the great spiritual heritage of Abraham that is now embodied by more than half of the earth's population. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all trace our faith back to the experience of a wandering Aramean. Half the world believes in a single God that created Adam and Eve and through Abraham, they produced a new Adam, the man we call Jesus Christ.

Another seed, more important than DNA passed on, comes into play. It is the seed of Faith. Faith was the determining factor in Abraham's life. Faith as a seed in Abraham's life became the tree that gave us the human and spiritual fruit the world has today. In my mind it is as if one seed of an orange tree produced all other oranges.

The faith of Abraham transformed him from an ancient tribesman named Abram to the father of many nations. Abram means “*a high or exalted father.*” The age, into which he was born, suggests that he came from a background of high culture and was no illiterate shepherd. At that time he may have run a household of over a thousand people. Sarai (Sarah-ee), which means “*princess*” was a half sister to Abraham. She became his wife, and together in obedience to their call, they left Haran, now modern Iran, to become Abraham, “*the father of a multitude*” and Sarah, “*noblewoman.*” From Sarah's womb would come kings. They were to produce many nations, including Arabs, Jews and Africans. God's covenant with him was not done in writing, it was not a contract, but it was made in a relationship based on faith and sealed with the circumcision of Abraham and all their male children. Abraham's faith was the belief that God would keep His end of the promise and Abraham in turn would serve God.

Abraham and Sarah due to their advanced age were as good as dead when they received the invitation to a covenant based on faith. This echoes the angel's declaration to Mary that “with God all things are possible.” It is never too late to believe the promises of God.

How can we be as convinced of God's promises as was Abraham? Are we convinced that God can keep His promises? Abraham was convinced enough to

leave home for some promised land. The disciples had to be convinced that they should lose their life for the gospel to gain it back.

Like Abraham and the disciples, people can be transformed by the renewing of their minds and hearts. They can believe in and see the promise of God come to fruition. The homeless by the mercies of God, can find a home. The jobless may find a job with God's help. A baby, abused and abandoned can be received into the home of a loving and caring family.

A life of faith is no picnic. It is a slow procession along the path toward a stronger faith, taking each of the forty days to Easter as a lesson for growth. If each day we could plant one seed of faith there would eventually be an entire forest full of trees to encourage us and others.

Lent is a journey of faith that need not weaken us, but makes us stronger. Romans 4:20 says of Abraham that "he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised." Abraham grew stronger in faith as he gave glory to God. St. Paul was inspired to write the words in that fourth chapter for our benefit.

How encouraging is that? Here was a man and a woman who didn't know what they were doing or where they were going. Abraham only knew that God wanted something from his life but he did not know what it was. Abraham and his half sister made mistakes along the way as we all do.

There are pitfalls in a spiritual journey. Few that I know of are ever straight. People may misunderstand us, we will make mistakes, and there may be things done and things left undone.

God knows I have fallen over and over again. Yet, He tells me, Bob, get up. I dropped out of college and thereby deeply hurt my parents. God led me as a very lost 20 year old to get up and reclaim my Christian faith. I later failed to get into one school and was accepted into two others. That led me into a life of caring for other people as a nurse, as a pastor, a chaplain and now a priest. Perhaps what I thought were failures, were actually part of God's plan for me.

Was there a time when you strayed off the road you were traveling? How did God help you get back on track? Or was it that He had another way that was meant for you?

Those who have gone astray from God, may as today's collect prays, be brought again "with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son..."

Our journey in Lent is a procession toward a better life. If Christianity does not give you comfort and the desire to live a better life, then by all means seek another religion. Be at peace that the Lord Jesus will find you wherever you go and whatever you believe. The psalmist says, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" Psalm 139:9.

St. Peter had his own beliefs that Jesus would be a new type of revolutionary leader that would restore Israel and theocracy. Peter rebuked Jesus upon hearing that he would be killed and risen again. Peter had no idea! He was clueless because

he did not truly understand who Jesus was. Neither did he know the purpose of the cross. In his moment of weakness, Peter wanted to derail the whole Lenten journey that would take Jesus to martyrdom and their loss. The cross was not in his plans! Yet when we take the cross there is no loss. We give glory to God when we perform acts of mercy, kindness and love. We give glory to God as our faith grows and we dare to believe the impossible. We grow giving glory to God when the cross is transformed from a weapon of death into a tool for powerful living.

As sinners we were as good as dead, but as Christians we are born again to a life that will never end. May we live giving thanks to God each day of Lent then stand back and watch the seeds of faith sprout and grow tall! Amen.