

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin

March 8, 2020

"LORD, GIVE US FAITH IN THE MIDST OF DOUBT"

1. LIKE ABRAM, LET US WALK WITH YOU

2. LIKE ABRAM, MAY YOU WALK WITH US

Genesis 12:1-8

My wife would question my sanity! In the moment, every fiber of my being shouted, "No!" Seven Sisters Falls. The island of Grenada. 35 feet off a sloping, moss-covered cliff into some of the most pristine water on earth. A year later I would tell the students, "No, we don't jump anymore. Someone died last week."

But on this day, I had to jump! Everyone else was! (Like I was 15 and stupid all over again!) I had made the climb! I wasn't going to be the "old guy" afraid! You know that emotional, physical response you get when looking over the edge—your body freezes, you can't move your feet, the bottom falls out of your gut? I remember praying: "Lord, I don't want to jump...but I want to jump! Will you bring me safely home to heav...I mean Wisconsin, Lord? Jean and the girls need me, Lord."

Has God ever willed you onto a cliff face NOT of your choosing without the option of turning around? "Lord, I don't want this! I CANNOT jump. I WILL not jump! Please take me off this cliff... Lord, you're NOT listening! TAKE me off this cliff!"

Have you ever doubted God's THEOLOGY? In all things God is at work for good... "Yeah, right! I'm not seeing it, Lord!" Have you ever doubted his PLAN and his LOVE! Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me." Where are you, Lord? I'm not seeing you. Just sayin'!"

Is doubt good in our Christian walk? Thomas doubted the resurrection, Jesus said, "Stop doubting and believe." Jonah doubted God's audacious love toward the city of Nineveh—forgiving Israel's archenemy rather than destroying them! God sent a storm and a fish that vomited Jonah out on dry land to challenge and to teach Jonah to trust and not doubt! Doubt may be a part of our journey as sinners, but our prayer always must be, "Lord, Give Me Faith in the Midst of Doubt!"

1. "Like Abram, Let Us Walk with You!"

A. The Lord's Will Is FULL of Challenges

The Christian's walk with his God is easy, right? "Lord, like Abram, Let Us Walk with You!" Until it's NOT. When God asks us to step outside our comfort zone and into the scary reaches of life! (If you have been paying close attention to the lives of the people around you, you know that The Lord's Will Is FULL of challenges! And maybe you are "one of those people.") Oh, the BIGNESS of the believing and the doing!

The LORD told Abram to leave his country...his people...his father's household and "go to a land I will show you!" You know if God told me to move to Chicago to start a church...I would go...on faith...wearing my green and gold...? But Abram moved 1000 miles...eventually...on foot! NO smart phone. NO Google Earth. No Zillo with a picture of the rental spot for the TENT he would live in for 100 years! (My mom refused to tent camp for one night much less 100 years!)

The LORD told Abram that he would be a great nation and that he and that nation would be a blessing to the whole earth! My friends, Abram saw Jesus! And THAT incentive of God appealed to Abram's faith—his blind trust in the midst of God's challenges. For back then, babies still took nine months, families formed in generations, and nations were rising from families and clans over HUNDREDS of years! But, "Abram went as the LORD had told him." Just another day at the office for Abram?! Hmm...the BIGNESS of believing and doing!

B. The Lord's Will Is All About TEACHING

It gets even better when one considers God's TIMING in everything—HIS timing, not ours! And God's VISION which is eternal, NOT physical!

Ladies and gents, Abram was 75 years old when God sent him on this quest—Sarai was 65! Now, Abram lived to be 175 and Sarai 127, but even then children at Sarai's age would have been dicey! So when Abram's entourage got to the land of Canaan, God worked with Abram and Sarai and got right after it, right? Sons and daughters hand over fist? "Go, Sarai, you nation builder?! Push! Push!"

Nope! 10 years in...still no son! Doubt crept in. Abram thought adoption; Sarai won out with a surrogate mother. But THAT was a house of cards collapsing on itself if you know the history for it was not God's plan, his will, HIS promise—it came from sin. So God repeated his promise: "I will surely give you a son by Sarai." For God's vision was eternal...he was working to save mankind with a plan where EVERY detail mattered...from the spear wound in Jesus' side on Good Friday to the bloodline of Abram and Sarai!

The Lord's will is important, so the Lord in his will is all about teaching. Abram and Sarai would catch up in time!

APPLICATION Are your doubts practical in nature? Or are they philosophical...even spiritual?

I knew a man whose heart was set on being a pastor. He invested his life to age 26 into seminary training, but when he was done the church said "No, you do not have the gifts." Anger entered his heart...and doubt. "Really, God? No call to ministry after all I have invested? Why did you open doors only to close them?" In time he has found his place and now sees God's plan.

"Why didn't God just end it all at Eden and send Adam and Eve to hell rather than letting evil persist? Makes me doubt the love and wisdom of God when I see all of this evil!" Until we ponder the love of God that longs to save every last ONE—"ONES" like you and me and Adam and Eve! That helps...

“A 21-year old drinking age, my eye!” says the 19-year old. “If I can die for my country, I am going to have a beer!” as he tosses back his fourth shortly before heading to his car. To doubt what God says because of MY opinion...?

The Lord’s will can be full of challenges even as HE is all about teaching. “Lord, Give Us Faith in the Midst of Doubt! Like Abram, Let Us Walk with You. But more importantly, “Lord, Like Abram, May YOU Walk with Us!”

2. “Like Abram, May You Walk with Us!”

A. Speak With Us as You Spoke With Him

Have you ever thought Abram had an unfair advantage? God APPEARED to him! How much easier to TRUST God and NOT doubt if he would just APPEAR to us, too, right? I’d like a vision in the night! A little dew on the ground but NOT on the fleece like Gideon, huh?

My friends, how many times did God actually speak to Abram in 175 years? We know of 8 times in 30 years. How available is your bible to you today? How near is the Word of God to you? The written word of God did not appear in this world until 600 years AFTER Abram—and BibleGateway.com for 4000 years! Who was better off—YOU or Abram?

God is willing to speak with us every day if we but open his word! This book is the heart of our God who speaks with us more richly than Abram ever knew, who sharpens us for heaven as surely as God sharpened Abram! The psalmist says of this book, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” Through this Word God walks with us and talks with us...sharpening us for heaven!

B. Sharpen Us for Heaven as You Sharpened Him

What did Abram hear when the LORD said to him, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you”? Jesus answered that question when he declared to the Jews: “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad!”

Since the days of Adam and Eve, to Noah and the flood and beyond, God’s people waited patiently for the Offspring of the woman to be born that God had promised our first parents. An offspring of the woman would crush the serpent’s head, take away the curse of sin and restore all things with the Creator as he had designed it. When Abram HEARD, “All peoples on earth be blessed through you”, Abram SAW Jesus. A reason to trust the plan of the LORD IN time and to move to a land NOT his own. Abram knew his journey was for the long haul of eternity and for the long reach of God’s love—all nations. So he stepped to the edge of God’s cliff for him! 100 years in a tent for Jesus was worth every grain of sand, every bug, every snake...

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations. 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised...who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Abram's faith saw the eternal plan and vision of God, so he listened to God's voice and walked with him. The LORD spoke into Abram's doubts, grounded him in the message of the Savior, gave him Isaac his son, and took him home to heaven in the faith of what would be!

APPLICATION Are your doubts practical, philosophical, spiritual? Doubts are as unique to us as we are unique as individuals. When I was in seminary, classmates said, "Strobel, you think too much!" At age 56, I say to myself, "Strobel, you THINK too much!" WHY do I question my God who he knows all things, sees all things, understands all things...compared to the myopic vision of one, 56-year old, little man? Why do I question the love of my God in the midst of illnesses and hurts unique to families, in the midst of conversations and hardships unique to me? Don't we do it because he invites us to? "Cast all your anxiety on him for he cares for you." Don't we do it because he promises to forgive us even in our doubt? "Lord, I believe! Help me in my unbelief."

Don't we do it because "No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ"? I can trust a God who would die for me. I can trust a God who knows personally my hurts. To walk in Jesus is to walk assured. To listen to Jesus is to grow in strength. For Jesus to walk with me? THAT is peace!

CONCLUSION I only jumped once! 35 feet of stupidity! Lord, help me always jump when YOU ask...landing safely in your arms forever! Amen.

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