

Midweek Lenten Service
March 23, 2011
Hebrews 11:1, 8-22

“The Faith of Abraham”

This evening we focus our attention on that towering figure from the Old Testament, Abraham, who is called the father of believers. Abram, whose name meant “exalted father,” became “Abraham, the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5). Abraham, whose name is invoked by God himself in his dealings with future generations of his chosen people: **“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”** (Exodus 3:6). In worship this past weekend, we heard about Abram’s call from God: **“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”** (Genesis 12:1-3). What is remarkable to me is that Abraham obeyed. We have no word from Scripture that Abraham even knew who God was prior to this (see Joshua 25:14), and yet he willingly obeys. And I ask myself: would I do that? Would any of us do that? Would we leave our familiar and comfortable lives behind to embark on a new venture, sight unseen, because God told us to? If we said “yes,” as Abraham did, then we will undoubtedly encounter people who will think we are crazy, as people undoubtedly thought Abraham was in his day. And yet, he held on to God’s promise in faith. That becomes a model for us today – to hold fast to God’s promise in faith.

In our Lenten journey, we are focusing on that catalog of the saints found in Hebrews 11 – Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israel, culminating in the Lord Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Of course, all of these individuals seem larger than life, and we may think that our own faith is small and puny compared with theirs. What can we learn from the faith of Abraham? In Hebrews 11, we find two words repeated over and over again – “by faith.” Before each individual’s name, those words “by faith” are recorded. And as the opening verse of Hebrews 11 reminds us: **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”** (Hebrews 11:1). Abraham’s faith was rooted in God’s promise that though he was childless, his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand by the seashore. Abraham trusted God to keep his promise, even when all outward circumstances indicated otherwise. That is faith, and it is no easy thing. To trust in that which we cannot see or prove runs counter to human reason and logic. It is something which many will scoff and snicker at, sometimes behind our backs and sometimes openly to our face. But is human reason and logic the final word, or is there something greater in life? Abraham believed there was.

When we walk by faith, that faith will be tested, as it was with Abraham. Scripture records how God tested Abraham, calling him to do the unthinkable by offering up his only son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. And again as before, Abraham trusted the Lord God, as we are told: **“He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back”** (Hebrews 11:19). The testing of our own faith might not be that severe, but then again, it might be. But why? Why does God do this? We look to God’s own Word for guidance here: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living**

hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:3-9). It is because Abraham's faith – and ours – is so incredibly precious and valuable in God's sight that he tests it in order to strengthen and fortify it. The testing of our faith is not easy, and often painful, but by God's grace it leads to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

Abraham, we are told, “**...died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar”** (Hebrews 11:13a). How blessed we are, who are Abraham's spiritual descendants in the faith, that we have received what he only saw from a far off distance: Jesus Christ, and the gift of life and salvation that is ours through his innocent suffering and death. Thanks be to God. Amen.