

Lent 2 Sermon
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If we look at Abraham's whole story up to this point (and we didn't know the ending) a lot of us would probably consider Abraham to be overly trusting and too optimistic. Years ago, God called Abraham out of the land that he had built a life in, the land where his family resided, into a new land. God promised that in return for Abraham going into this new land, God would make of him a great nation, and would bless him. God told Abraham that he would be given this land and that Abraham's offspring would be like the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, so Abraham's offspring would be counted. Basically, God promised Abraham land and children, and children's children, and a multitude of descendants. This was significant, because Abraham and his wife Sarah were not a fertile young couple. In fact, when God first promised Abraham children, he was 75 years old, and his wife Sarah, wasn't much younger. And though they had hoped to have children their entire lives, that never happened. So for Abraham to finally be told that he and his wife would have children after so many years of being unable to conceive, the trade-off of moving to a new land must have seemed trivial in light of the reward God promised.

We need to keep all of this in mind when reading the Genesis story today. Though Abraham was 75 when God first made his promise, we are told he is now 99. And throughout these years Abraham has been expectantly awaiting the fulfillment of the promise God has made to him, specifically the promise of offspring. Abraham and Sarah were already old when God had made this promise, so every year that passed must have made the probability that this promise would actually be fulfilled seem less and less likely. Yet Abraham has been expecting that he and Sarah would have children, in spite of all the years they have been waiting. And in this reading God once again assures Abraham that he and Sarah will indeed have children, telling Abraham, "You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you." And Abraham believed God. In spite of all that seemed to be working against him, Abraham believed God.

And Abraham's faith stands in stark contrast to Peter's lack thereof. In the Gospel reading, Peter rebukes Jesus after Jesus teaches his disciples about his eventual death and resurrection. Jesus' words to Peter may seem harsh—"Get behind me Satan!" but they make sense when viewed in the light of Abraham's faith. In spite of worldly concerns like his age and health, Abraham believed in God's promise of life, of God's promise of offspring for Abraham. However, Peter was so caught up in worldly concerns such as suffering and death that he lost sight of Christ's promise—that after he died, in three days he would rise again. Thinking on Christ's death understandably upset Peter. There was nothing wrong with that. But Peter made the mistake of allowing the tragedy of this world to make him doubt the promises of God.

We face all kinds of difficult events in this life, events that concern us, that preoccupy us, that sadden us, that make us weep. And these events are important to us and affect us deeply. And that's okay. But the problem is that we can sometimes allow these events to overcome us, to paralyze us, to pull us away from our faith. Even in the face of tragedy, we should not be completely defeated,

It may seem foolish for we Christians to be so optimistic, but Paul explains why this is not the case. In spite of the tragedies of this world, we Christians always have hope, because

we believe in God, “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” While others put their hope only in earthly things, a Christian does not, because a Christian's true citizenship is in heaven. No matter what happens on this earth, our bodies will be conformed to the body of Christ's glory. Yet even in this world we should not allow ourselves to become so focused on those things that seem so counter to the glory of God that we lose sight of hope. Though we know all will be vindicated in the world to come, as Christians we should always seek to find ways that God is working in the world, right here, right now, and not become so overwhelmed with the bad that we become blind to the good.

As it is Lent, we tend to talk a lot about sin, and it is true that it is possible to become so preoccupied with the negative events of this life that we are led into sin. That's not to say that the events of this life are unimportant or that they should not affect us. They are extremely important and should affect us deeply. The problem, the sin, is not in being concerned with the problems we face in this world. It's in becoming so preoccupied with the sad events in this world that we can no longer acknowledge the good or we accept the evils of this world as unchangeable. It's in thinking that the concerns of this world, no matter how difficult or heart-wrenching they are, are greater than God—that they are greater than God's redemptive power, greater than God's promise of salvation, greater than God's love for us.

As easy and understandable as it would sometimes be to completely turn away from God in the difficult moments in our lives, those are the times we most need to remind ourselves of God's promises. And though we sometimes wish that God's promises included living simple, carefree, sadness-free lives, that is simply not the case. But what God DOES promise us in constant love and a source of strength, of guidance when we don't know which path we should follow. Though many wrong things occur in this world, we are also constantly surrounded by blessings, and we are promised that all things will be made right, that all things will be made new, in the place where our true citizenship lies—not in this world, but the next. We are promised that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. In this season of Lent, let us re-commit ourselves to turning to God, even in the difficult moments of our lives, especially in those difficult moments. Let us commit to having a faith like Abraham, believing in God's promises in spite of the difficulties we face. And let us remember in the midst of the changes and chances of this life, we can always work towards the good with the help of God. Amen