

TRUST, BE NOT AFRAID, BE PREPARED

Genesis 15:1-6

Luke 12:35-40

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Babcock Presbyterian Church

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Last Sunday we were (re)introduced to the Rich Fool who discovered too late, after his life was suddenly cut short, that all his accumulated wealth got him absolutely no satisfaction when he found himself standing face to face with his Lord and Maker who wasn't at all impressed with the Rich Man's bank accounts and resume.

This Sunday's readings, from both Genesis and Luke's Gospel, are a continuation of the same theme. Today however, we're not just warned about putting all our eggs in the wrong basket, but we're also encouraged to first and foremost,

- 1) trust yourself to in God in all things,
- 2) be prepared for whenever God decides to encounter you unexpectedly and maybe even in disguise
- 3) and be not afraid.

The Rich Fool was never able to do any of these things because sometime early on he decided to trust only in himself, so being afraid someday he'd be broke, he invested all his energy into becoming so successful in material ways that he gave himself little or no time for laying up treasures in heaven.

In the Genesis passage we read about the latest in a series of important life decisions made by Abram (who from this point on will be referred to as Abraham). These decisions not only impacted Abraham personally but everyone else who ever lived because these were primarily faith decision, based on his deepest conviction that God, for some mysterious reason, (remember, he was an old man) interrupted his comfortable retirement and commanded him to pull up stakes and move his family, servants, and possessions to an undisclosed location that God (Abraham believed) promised him.

Would you be willing to do likewise, give up and leave everything behind to move to an unknown, insecure future with no guarantees, only a promise from an inner voice that may or may not be God's?

Some might say Abraham's journey to the Promised Land was no different than the pioneers who left their homes behind for the new frontier. Certainly there are comparisons. Like Abraham, these pioneers had to be genuine risk takers with a sense of adventure, most even had faith in God, but that's where the comparisons end. Abraham's greatest decisions, beginning with trusting that inner voice and going to the Promised Land and finally deciding to trust that same voice again by making preparations to sacrifice his only son and heir as a burnt offering, these were decisions that laid the foundation for the birth and passion of the Christ.

Here's how: Today's reading tells the story about God's next promise to Abraham soon after settling in the Promised Land. Growing older and still childless, God came to Abraham in a vision and said, "Do not be afraid. I am your shield; your reward will be great."

Obviously Abraham heard this promise before, but so far God didn't deliver. So Abraham did what most of us do when we're frustrated with God, we call him out, we challenge God because we think, "He owes me!" Apparently (and thankfully) God welcomes our challenges because God didn't bawl out Abraham or even worse, strike

him dead. Instead God patiently listened and then responded to Abraham's concern about still being without an heir.

Keep in mind, Abraham wanted an heir to carry on his name and memory, but God would give Abraham a son to fulfill the promise made earlier, that Abraham would father a great nation that would be a blessing to all the families of the earth and that blessing would be wonderfully confirmed through Jesus, a descendant of King David, who was a descendant of Abraham.

Then, to seal the deal God led Abraham out from his tent to see the night sky. "Look towards the heavens and count the stars, if you are able, count them... So shall your descendants be." (Genesis 15:5)

The passage goes on to read, "And he (Abraham) believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6)

Two key words in this verse we need to carefully consider, the first being "righteousness." What does that mean? It means Abraham was right with God because he had confidence in God. Responding to God's goodness, Abraham realized God made the decision to trust him, so he made the decision to trust God. Keep in mind Abraham didn't just "believe all that God stuff," instead Abraham made another decision, (remember, his first was to trust God when he pulled up stakes and left his home to go to the Promised Land) to trust God again, believing that somehow, even though he was childless, he'd be the father of a great nation.

The second key word is "reckoned". Reckoned isn't a word we normally if ever use nowadays and if we do hear it being used it's in cowboy movies, ("I'll reckon I'll be moving on now.") The dictionary says "reckon" means to accept something as certain or to count on someone. Knowing all things, including Abraham's heart, God reckoned or knew he could count on Abraham to do the right thing, which leads us to conclude God believes in us more than we believe in ourselves.

So far I've been talking about Abraham's faith journey with all its hard challenges and decisions. Now's the time to use Abraham's story, with all its ups and downs, as a template for our own stories which are certainly very different from Abraham's but paradoxically very similar.

It's probable none of us will ever be asked to pull up stakes and turn our lives upside down on the same scale as Abraham, but aren't we being asked to pull up stakes and turn our lives upside down in a way that's unique to each of us? It's not God's intention that we stay the way we are. We aren't created in God's image to live safe and dull, uneventful lives.

Instead God gives you a choice. You can do it God's way or you can do it your way. Unfortunately, most of us try to have it both ways. Carefully read more of Abraham's story in Genesis and you'll find he did too. Sometimes he thought God was moving too slow so he took matters into his own hands and made a mess of things, but at those pivotal times when Abraham was either being challenged or tested, God knew, through it all, he could count on Abraham. Can the same be said for us?

Lord knows sometimes his inner voice asks us to do some crazy things that just don't make sense unless, like Abraham, you discern it's God who's asking you to do something crazy, disruptive, costly and risky, so defying common sense, you trust God will make it happen, even if it's just through you. When God wants you to do something that's crazy or scary or both you can always be sure God will not only show you the way, he'll also make the way clear. God isn't like the older sister who wants to get her younger brother in trouble so she gives him a rock and tells him, "Break the window and

don't worry, I'll fix it," while having no intention whatsoever of fixing it. Instead, if God challenges you to do something important that will have enormous implications for good, there's always the promise behind the challenge that God won't let you down and leave you hanging, especially when things don't work out the way you thought or hoped.

For Abraham, the first of countless others called to faith, God promised Abraham a new homeland plus a son and heir who would yield descendants that culminated in the birth and passion of the Christ. That same promise continues to be kept through Jesus, who said:

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom...where you treasure is there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:32, 34)

The Rich Fool never got satisfaction because he looked in the wrong place. Truth be told, from time to time you and I, like Abraham, look in the wrong places too. But when the chips are down and it's all or nothing, when it comes time to make the really hard and big decisions, pray that God can count on you to make the right decision to be and do your best for Christ and his Kingdom.

If you're wondering what it will take to be obedient and brave enough to make the right decision, remember this secret yet simple formula already mentioned at the beginning of the sermon:

- 1) Trust your life to God
- 2) Be not afraid
- 3) Always be prepared for God to show up unexpectedly.

And when your trust level is exhausted, you're scared to death and you're not prepared for when God shows up unexpectedly?

Then just let God love and keep you. After all, there's always next time.