

Genesis 15:1-6; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

August 7, 2016

“Given Faith”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Pentecost 12

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Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[*Introduction*] Twice in our Scripture readings today God says, ***“Do not be afraid!”***

And you have heard such words before:

***“Believe. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. He will provide for you.”***

But a reality check – just look around

and we may think we have good reason to fear.

Two small boys walked into a dentist’s office.

One of them said bravely, ***“I want a tooth taken out, and I don’t want any anesthetic, because we’re in a hurry!”***

The dentist replied, ***“You’re brave—which tooth is it?”***

The boy turned to his smaller friend and said, ***“Show him your tooth, Tommy!”***

When someone tells us not to be afraid, we may feel like Tommy.

In every stage of life, we must face the nemesis of fear.

In childhood, it is the dark.

In teenage years, it’s the fear of being socially different.

As adults – well we fear for our children, or worry about retirement.

Finally, death itself causes fear.

[*Abraham’s Faith*]

Can anyone shore up our faith? Yes!

The God of Abraham, the great I AM, comes to us today in his Word and says,

***“Do not be afraid.”***

God establishes a relationship that enables us to face our fears.

First, God established a covenant with Abraham.

In our text, a covenant was renewed with Abraham,

a covenant that was renewed throughout Abram’s life.

When Abram had doubts, the Lord assured him,

***“Don’t be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward” (15:1).***

The all-sufficient and all-powerful I AM, who called Abram to leave his country and travel to the Promised Land, also promised to provide for him and protect him.

Abram, just simply, believed the Lord.

The great I AM, who gave to Abraham the promised son in Isaac, is the same God who promises to take away our fears and provide for us.

**[Our Faith]**

You know, God establishes a covenant with us.

God adopts us into his family in Baptism,  
gives us faith through which we, like Abraham, are deemed righteous (Gen 15:6),  
and establishes peace forever in our hearts.

God forgives our sins and grants us everlasting life with him.  
And we can count on him to sustain us.

God's action moves us to trust him completely.  
You see... Since God made good on his promise to save us in Christ,  
we trust him to provide for us.

He moves us from fear to faith. Did you hear that? He moves us from fear to faith.

The Lord does this because he is the great I AM,  
the all-sufficient God of the universe, who is our shield and very great reward.

Yes, it is God who gives us faith to face our fears.  
Because God has established a relationship with us through his only Son, Jesus Christ,  
we have a faith which is ***“sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”***

**[Three Things]**

So three things about this faith of ours:

We are given faith that <i>sees the invisible.</i>
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Faith does not have to see it to believe it.

None of us were around to observe God create the world by his spoken, invisible word (Heb 11:3).

Nor did any of us see God's incarnate Word be born, suffer and die on the cross, then rise again.

Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn 21:29).

As God strengthens our faith through his Word and Sacraments, we learn to trust him, even though we often can't see the fulfillment of his promises.

We are given faith that <i>sees the invisible.</i> <b>AND</b> We are given faith that <i>believes the incredible.</i>
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God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation and that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky.

Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, way beyond her child-bearing years. And they would have descendants?

Abraham's reaction was something like, "O Lord, that's incredible!"  
God's promise was contrary to human reason and experience, yet he caused it to come true.

God calls us to trust him for our future and to believe his promises, even though they may seem incredible.

It indeed seems incredible that God would love us, knowing the way we are.  
It seems incredible that God would give up his only Son for you and me,  
that we might be forgiven and live forever with him.  
It may seem incredible that no matter how bad things are,  
the Lord is our shield and our very great reward.

Sometimes we are like the grandpa who took his first airplane ride at the age of 86.  
The private plane circled for about 20 minutes, then landed. The children asked him, "Well, Grandpa, how did you like it?" "Fine," he replied, "but I never did put my full weight down on the blasted thing!"  
As if that was even possible!

As God's people, our full weight and trust is in the Lord our God.

In spite of our fears and apprehensions,  
he fills us with His mercy and gives us faith to believe even the incredible.

Oh Yes!

We are given faith that *sees the invisible.*

We are given faith that *believes the incredible.* **AND**

We are given faith that *receives the impossible.*

It seemed impossible that Abraham could have a son and be the father of a great nation.  
It can seem just as impossible that even though we sin much daily,  
God forgives us in Christ  
and uses us to extend his kingdom.

Do you see “impossible” hurdles before you?  
Do you have “impossible” problems?  
Do you have fears that just won’t go away?

God grants us faith to trust him in every circumstance.

God’s mercy in Christ enables us to receive his assurance and courage,  
even in those situations which seem impossible.

**[Conclusion]**

A great man of faith was asked,

“If God promised in his Word to walk with you through a brick wall, would you try it?”

“Yes,” the man answered. “I would walk by faith, and God would make a hole.”

Sometimes the future looks like a brick wall.  
It did to Abraham and Sarah.  
And it certainly can for us too!

Yet the God who cares for us is the great I AM.  
He assures us, “I am your shield and very great reward.”  
Through him we have a faith that  
— sees the invisible,  
— believes the incredible, and  
— receives the impossible.

Invisible, incredible, impossible ... that is the faith given to you! Amen!

Now, let us sing a joyful noise unto the Lord! Amen!