

[sermon Sep 12, 15, 16 Abraham 2018]

SEPTEMBER 12/15/16, 2018 1ST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

GENESIS 12:1-9

The Call of Abraham and Sarah

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Waiting...



If you're like me, it can get really hard at times to wait for something significant to happen – good or bad. So, because I'm a *DARK LUTHERAN* let's start with the **negative**.

One experience that I recall from my childhood (mainly because I remember it happening...at least a time or two!), was when Mom would say something like, *Just wait until your Father gets home!!* (I know!....it's kind of hard to imagine me as a disobedient child, right??)

That's just one example of a bunch of times when we're forced to wait for something that will most likely be unpleasant (to say the least!):

Suddenly the Lord pops into his life and says, “*Go West, young man!*” (You heard what the Lord *actually* said: *Go from your country, your family and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.*)



In the Lord’s short speech to Abraham, God gives to the two of them a three-part promise.

God promises to:

- give them a LAND,
- give them a ton of CHILDREN so that they will become a great NATION,
- and to BLESS them so that they might bless all the families of the earth...

Not a bad gig, right? And here’s the deal – God does not **require** them to do **anything** in **return**. This is no carrot-and-a-stick policy – it’s more like winning the Lottery – without even buying a **ticket**. Just pick-up-and-go!

So that’s what they do – they head out into the desert on a very long journey until they finally reach the land of Canaan...

Now...if Abraham and Sarah were hoping to get their three-part prize from God *easily* and *right away*, they were in for some severe **disappointment!**

In fact, by this time, the shine of that special promise is already a little covered with **dust**. For one thing, travelling across the desert is hard work.

For another – it turns out that there are lots of Canaanites living in the land of Canaan (*I know! Go figure!*). So, though Abraham's family is allowed to graze their **flocks** on the land, they are not invited to...**own** the land, to move into the **neighborhood**, to make **that** place their **own**.

Time goes on – and, God blesses their flocks...still **decades later**, here's what they have:

The LAND that God promised? The only property they own is a **burial plot!**

Many CHILDREN and a great nation? They don't even have **one** child.

And their BLESSING that's supposed to bless the whole world? Nothing... nada...Nichts.



We know how hard it is to wait.

When someone promises to...take us on a trip to Disneyland, or build us a house, or buy us a bicycle, we want to know **WHEN** that nice thing is going to happen... And the longer we have to **WAIT** for it, the more **susceptible** we become to seeds of **doubt** that can start to take **root** in our **hearts**...

So picture poor Abraham and Sarah! When 1 year turns into 5...and 5 turns into 10...and 10 turns into 20... At one point, Abraham asks God about the promise, particularly about God's promise of children...since he and Sarah continue to be childless – and are most definitely not getting any younger!

So, what happens to **you** when you're forced to **wait** – especially for news that's *delayed* or *not good*? Are you filled with *faith*? Are you content to *trust*? Is your **heart** held up by *hope*?, at ease with **not** knowing what the future might bring??

OR...are you like 99% of the human race where such waiting takes a *toll* on your *soul*, when the comfort of **restful sleep** eludes you, when you're **powerless** to power-**down** your brain as it insists on replaying every possible bad-or-worse-case scenario imaginable...especially in the dark of the night?

That kind of waiting can eventually compromise our *health* (mental, physical and spiritual)...AND compromise our **TRUST** in *God*...



In 1844, the French author Alexandre Dumas completed his famous novel, The Count of Monte Cristo. An innocent and positive young man by the name of Edmond Dantes is wrongfully accused of plotting a rebellion against the French government.

His accusers send him to an island prison from which no one can escape...and then they tell his loved ones that he has died. For six years he waits, and hopes, and prays...in vain. Finally, the waiting becomes too much of a burden, and Dantes gives up – he decides to end his life by going on a secret starvation diet...

All is going according to his sad plan, and just when he's about at the end of his life, Dantes hears a scratching on the other side of his cell wall. Intrigued enough to explore the noise, Edmond starts digging at the mortar between the bricks. Before long, a hole opens up to reveal an older prisoner on the other side who was trying to tunnel his way out of the fortress.

This man, nicknamed "The Priest" for his devotion to God, takes Dantes under his wing. For his help in continuing to dig the tunnel, the priest then teaches the young man how to read, how to fight with **words** and **swords**, and how to be a gentleman...

Where Dantes is motivated to work hard by a thirst for **revenge**, the Priest tries to teach the youth...about *waiting in faith*, about **trusting** in God's good and gracious **will**.

With a disgusted snort, Dantes says, *I don't believe in God!*

With a knowing sparkle in his eye, the priest looks at him and says, *It doesn't matter...He believes in you!*

This is, I'm convinced, one of **the most important realizations** that **we** – **you** and **me** and **all** of **humanity** – will hopefully cling to during our walk of faith in life. Over and over again, throughout our lives, we're told in both subtle and straightforward ways, that what really matters, what matters most, what matters only, is that we must earn our way into heaven.

The world even likes to wave the gift of faith as the ultimate work, saying **you HAVE TO believe in God!!** Presented that way, it turns the Spirit's gift of faith into a burden that's placed squarely on our shoulders. It leaves us responsible for establishing and maintaining our relationship with God...and that, if you're like me, is a formula for disaster!

Instead, says the Apostle Paul, as well as good old Martin Luther, God's gift of faith is literally a gift – and keeping it alive in our hearts is God's responsibility, one that the Lord's Spirit takes very seriously.

Abraham and Sarah, are the poster children for this truth about faith. Those two long-suffering servants of the Lord are proof that God's is a gift, undeserved and unearned. And that keeping the promise alive in their hearts (and ours) is also a gift from heaven.

So in Genesis 15, when Abraham asks God about *the wait*, about why it's taking so long for the Lord to fulfill heaven's promise... God tells Abraham to go outside the tent and look up at the night sky. Then the Lord challenges him to count the number of stars that he can see...

If you've ever stood outside on a starry, starry night, when there's not an iota of intruding light, you know that counting the stars is an impossible task, right? **But do you remember what God says to Abraham?**

So the Lord simply nods, and says to Abraham, *So will your descendants be.* That's it. No answer to the question WHEN??? No scolding Abraham-and-Sarah for their feelings of anxiety. Just the same promise one more time, given freely and with love... And miracle of miracles, the bible tells us that *Abraham believed...and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness* (v. 6).



For with God nothing will be impossible (Luke 1:37).

And that's the story of how Abraham and Sarah were blessed...blessed to be a blessing.

By the time that they both had died, God's three-fold promise of LAND, CHILDREN, and BLESSING, was still in its state of infancy. The only LAND they ever owned was that burial plot and the field in which it lies. The only CHILD they ever had together, was ISAAC. So what about that last part of the promise, the BLESSING, the assertion that through them all the families of the world would be blessed???

Well the first part of the answer to that question is this...take a look around you. The fact that we, so far removed by **centuries**, by **culture** and by **distance**, that we are here praising the very same Lord, is all because *with God nothing is impossible*.

So just like Sara and Abraham, you and I are called to **trust** in God's promise that the Lord will be with **us** to protect and love, to lead and help, to comfort and give us strength. And...that throughout this long, challenging, drawn-out adventure, God...believed in Abraham and Sarah.

That is a word of very good news – that the God who hung the stars in the heavens, the God who made this promise to our spiritual ancestors, the God who sacrificed heaven's only begotten Son, is the very God who believes in you... and you...and me. This, I'm convinced, is the blessing that God has distributed through Abraham and Sara – to us...and will, through us, send it on to unknown others. What a gift of Amazing Grace, that the Lord believes in us: truly, with our God, nothing is impossible! Amen.