

Sunday, February 28, 2021 Sermon
Second Sunday after Lent

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord.

I love the line in Scripture saying that Abraham was as good as dead. I'll admit that when I was younger, I thought this meant he was advanced in age, an old geezer. Now that I am approaching geezerhood, I realize that this is really something that is quite theologically profound. We all are as good as dead. That what the law has done. It has condemned us. We are guilty under the law. That is good news. I cannot fulfill the law, but that is not the expectation.

What then? Abraham was asked to sacrifice the only hope he knew. He was willing to give up his earthly hopes and trust that God would fulfill hope for eternity. In the type of Isaac, we too are asked to sacrifice what we know for what we do not know. That is one of the reasons we call it faith. Having assurance in things which we hope for and the conviction to act on that unseen hope. My hope is certainly not based upon lawlessness. That will never do. It is based upon something much greater. It is based upon the really Good News of what Christ has done.

We call it Good News, but sometimes, we do not like the news. We hear things and do not believe. Sarah heard that she was going to have a child and laughed. The name given, Isaac, means "Laughter." God does have a sense of humor. But behind this, it is for us to realize that God does have all of these things in His hands. He does know what He intends and it shall come to pass as He has said.

I do not know where you are in your walk of faith. The Lord does. This last year has been tough on us all as we have had to conform to new things, many of which we did not like. We are still dealing with the aftermath of fear. Yes, there are things to be afraid of, but also, there is the promise of God. A simple question which might help each one of us, "Do I fear the circumstances of this world, or do I trust the Lord more?" Through all things, the Psalm reminds us to offer up praise to the Lord. Praise Him in all circumstances and for all things.

To the prophets and through them, God spelled out what Messiah would be like. Of course, we want a Savior who will rescue us from circumstances. "I'm in a mess Jesus, save me." We may say this without realizing that the real mess is our Genesis 3 problem with sin. We all have it and we confessed it this morning. Yes, all of our sins are forgiven, but now comes the Lent work of being sifted by the Holy Spirit to be made clean. We say, "Create in me a clean heart," and that is exactly what the Lord intends to give us. I am often suspect that many Christians do not realize what they are in for when they make a confession to be Christian. Jesus is not just going to brush us off and send us our way. He's going to give us a cross and bring us, with Him, His way.

The Epistle of Romans follows a steady cadence that instructs on leading the Christian life. We hear the Good News right off the bat. Then we are told about the hedonistic sinners who are all busy with pleasures of the flesh. Church people love to use this to segregate from "Those sinners." Then we are reminded that we are equally guilty because our sin may not be evident on the outside, but it sure is going on in the inside. We are led to the place where we realize that no one is righteous. Righteousness comes through faith. We are saved by grace through faith. Just as it was true of Abraham, it is true of us.

Jesus gives us clear instructions. We are to follow Him. Only He knows all that is needed. Too often, we each want things the way we imagine they should be. We have just experienced a year where we know this is not and cannot be true. Only those who have some ulterior motive could be happy with what we have experienced. Add to that our personal turmoil and the wicked one can tempt us away from the simple truth that Jesus knew this was coming and His promises are no less true for us today than when they were when things were, as we might say, normal.

We have been blessed. We have been able to go to and fro as those before us could not have imagined. Has this increased freedom increased faithfulness? By all appearances, no. Our human circumstances often take us deeper into the place of thinking we can grasp some kind of control over those things we do not like.

We are tempted to rebuke Jesus. Oh, we may not come out and say it, but we may be tempted to tell the Lord that we are disappointed. He is the author and finisher of our faith. He knows all that is needed. He will lead us in the way we should go. Be guided not by what you do not know, but by the One who knows all things. We each need to walk the journey our Lord has put before us.

There are many in our generation who seem to have fled from the truth of our Lord. I know many who want nothing to do with church. If they mean the social organized society that does things in a particular way, I understand. But, more truthfully, there is this notion going around that all we need do is ask and the Lord will grant whatever we ask. He alone is Lord. If He chooses, He will do what we ask. But if He chooses not to do what we ask, He is still Lord. This is a principle that seems to sorely be lacking in our world. We are followers.

Come then into the counsel of the Lord and see what He is making of you. Our Lord waited until Abraham and Sarah were very advanced in years before granting the child of promise. The Lord is not slow as some count slowness. His timing is always perfect. Why have we been through such a difficult time? The past few years have been tough. But we are looking at these things through the eyes of sinful humanity. Rather than lamenting, "Why Lord," we should be asking, "What are You preparing us for?" This is true all of our lives. The Lord loves us enough to move us beyond ourselves to come to the place where we depend upon Him. We do depend upon Him for everything, it just seems that we often forget this simple truth.

This brings us to the place of true faith. As we came into the world, so shall we leave. We brought nothing in and we will take nothing out. What then? Rejoice in this day the Lord has given you and be thankful for what He has given. Know that our Lord is conforming You to His image. Be guided by Him and not the whims of the world. As I say this, I know how difficult these things are to put into our hearts and live. But that is the very struggle we need to enter in order to walk with Jesus. Our Lord, who was tempted for forty days and forty nights, understands what it is to struggle. Our Lord, who went to the cross and suffered a horrifying death, understands pain. He calls us to follow Him.

Come then and let us journey together to see what is before us, Yes, we need to work through what we feel about what has gone on before, but grace is always calling us forward. Learning the humility of the Lord, we gain the gift of anticipation for what the Lord is doing in our midst, with You, in the hope which is ours through the promises of Christ. Come and learn again to treasure your faith as more precious than anything in this world. Learn to truly love the Lord above all things. You already have the greatest treasure. Live in hope and abide in Christ. Amen.