



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Second Sunday in Lent (A) – Romans 4:1-5. 13-17

Focus: *Faith Like Abraham*

word of life

“For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.” (Romans 5:13 NRSV)

Read Romans 4:1-5. 13-17

The Apostle Paul was born into a Jewish family. He viewed the world as a descendent of Abraham and heir to the promises made by God to Abraham. In his studies to be a Pharisee, he obtained in-depth knowledge about Jewish scripture and the law.

But after the Apostle Paul began to follow Jesus Christ, he became a missionary primarily to Gentiles (non-Jews). Yet his Jewish roots and knowledge of scripture allowed him to be a bridge between Jews and Gentiles as he articulated the message about Jesus to the first generation of followers of Jesus. Paul skillfully and painstakingly attempted to navigate between images of his Jewish heritage which were shared by Jesus while also pointing to a new age and a new way of approaching God.

In this particular passage in his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul points to the example of Abraham and his faith. To understand this passage, you will need to be well-versed in the call and promises made to Abraham (who previously was called Abram until God changes his name). Genesis 12:1-5 describes God’s call to Abraham who is asked to leave his home country and go to a distant land. The Lord said, “Go,” and 75-year-old Abraham (Abram) went as the Lord commanded him. Sounds simple!

1. *How would you respond today if God said to you, “Go!”?*
2. *What would be hardest to leave behind? Who would you want to take with you?*
3. *How much faith did it take for Abram and his family to do as God asked?*

There is little wonder why Abraham is considered a prime example of faithfulness. God called him and he acted. At one point, God asked Abraham to look up towards heaven and count the stars in the sky. “Then [God] said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:5b-6 NRSV)

The Apostle Paul used Abraham as an example of a person of great faith whom God called and blessed—before the law came into being. Thus, Abraham was similar to the Gentiles who did not follow the laws of Judaism. In this passage in Romans, Paul reminds Jews and Gentiles that Abraham was a man of faith:

- before he was blessed by God.
- before he entered the covenant with God and had his named changed to Abraham.
- before his circumcision.
- before the law.

That may or may not sound of great significance to you, but Paul was breaking radical ground. He was trying to address questions bombarding the first century church: Could a person have faith without being Jewish? Could a person be justified before God through their faith and not because of their ability to fulfill the law of scripture?

4. *How might the first century Jews have responded to Paul’s example of Abraham?*
5. *What is so radical about Paul’s message?*

Word among us

Be Blessed! Have you heard someone at the store send you on your way with that greeting? Or someone in a movie theater sneezes and a whisper is heard, “Bless you!”

1. *What does it mean to be blessed? Who can bless?*
2. *What does it mean for God to bless you?*

In the Old Testament, Abraham is just one of many examples of someone whom God blessed. Yet Abraham’s blessing is significant because it is not only personal to Abraham, but also casts such a wide vision. God promises Abraham to make him a great nation, to bless him, and to make his name great. When God made this blessing, Abraham and his wife Sara were in their seventies and had no children.

3. *What did Abraham do to deserve such a blessing by God?*

There is no indication that Abraham was blessed because of his works. Paul put it this way, “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.” (Romans 4:2 NRSV) Abraham was a man of faith who was an undeserving recipient of God’s grace. There is no indication that Abraham responded to leave his homeland and head to the promised land in order to obtain the blessings offered by God. Instead, Abraham responded out of deep and obedient trust in God.

4. *Describe how easy or difficult it is for you to receive a gift or kind act with no strings attached?*
5. *What does it mean for you to be a recipient of God’s grace?*

There is a universal aspect to Paul’s writings which cannot be denied. In Genesis 12:3 God’s blessing to his servant Abraham (Abram) ends, “... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Jews, Muslims, Christians, and others trace their spiritual family tree to Abraham. He is considered to be the father of faith to many in the world—including Gentiles who have become followers of Jesus Christ.

6. *How have all the families of the earth been blessed through Abraham?*
7. *What are ways this blessing has yet to be fulfilled?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

It is not about our works and good deeds. As much as we want to earn our way to eternal life, we cannot. So, there is nothing for us to boast before God. It is God who claimed us in our baptism, sealed us with the Holy Spirit, and marked our foreheads with the cross of Christ forever. We are recipients of God’s mercy and grace.

Clearly God has compassion for all families of this earth, envisioning Abraham and his descendents to be the vehicle of blessing. God’s blessing to Abraham is haunting, “... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3 NRSV) Too often hatred for those of other faith traditions leads to bloodshed and violence.

8. *When will the hatred stop and the blessing be fully realized?*
9. *When it comes to interfaith relations, how are we to treat one another?*

Prayer

Through Abraham, you have blessed all families of the earth. Help us to be a blessing in our daily life. Amen

last word

Seek out someone from another faith tradition for conversation and bless him or her with your listening ear.