

What, Me Worry?  
Genesis 15:1-6  
August 7, 2016

*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

At the top of the 1,000-foot mountainous peaks of Meteora, Greece, monasteries were built hundreds of years ago. Because of their impossible location, these monasteries became places of solitude, safety, and security. Up until the last century, goods, and visitors had to be winched up in a basket that was hand-powered by the monks. Those who made the ascent found the ride a most terrifying experience.

One of these tourists admitted to getting nervous about halfway up the cliff. That's because he noticed that the rope seemed old and frayed. Thinking he might relieve his fear, at least somewhat, he asked one of the monks riding with him, "How often do you change the rope?" Without a moment's hesitation, the reply came back, "Whenever it breaks!"

I once read that the Bible has 365 places where we are told not to be afraid. That would be one for every day of the year. It will do you well, if every day, the first thing you do is reassure yourself that God tells you to "fear not."

In today's sermon text, the first thing God says to Abraham is: *Fear not*. If you have read much of Scripture, you've heard God telling you, over and over, "*Fear not*. I've got everything covered." So why are we so often afraid? We begin to fear when we look around and see that not all of God's promises have been fulfilled yet. When that happens, our sinful nature tells us that God's promises are not true and we have reason to fear.

Fear is personal. When someone, who doesn't share our fear, tells us not to be afraid, it doesn't always have the desired effect of putting our hearts to rest. It's like the two small boys who walked into the dentist's office. The older boy said, "I want a tooth taken out, and I don't want any anesthetic, because we're in a hurry." The dentist replied, "You're a brave young man. You don't seem to be afraid at all. Now which tooth is it?" The older boy turned to the younger boy and said, "Show him your tooth, Tommy."

When someone else tells us not to be afraid, we might feel like Tommy. Fear is personal and at every stage in our lives we face that demon fear. As children we might fear the dark or being alone. As teenagers we fear we might not be liked by other

teenagers. As adults we fear for our children or we worry about retirement. And, in our final hours, we fear death because death is the ultimate unknown.

The question of the day is, "Can anyone built up our faith so we can face our fears?" And the answer is a resounding yes. The same God, who told Abraham not to fear, the great I AM, comes to us today in his Word and says, *Fear not*.

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

God established a relationship with Abram that took the form of a covenant. God renewed this covenant, this agreement, with Abram several times during his life. Whenever Abram started having doubts and fears, God would assure him: *Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great*. In other words, "Relax, Abe, I've got things covered." The same all-powerful God who called Abram to leave his land and travel to the Promised Land, also promised to protect and provide for Abram.

Abram believed God and he believed in God's promises. Today's text was the third time God promised to make Abram and his descendants into a great nation, and Abram was convinced that God could and would do just that.

As a further guarantee of his promise, God changed Abram's name from Abram, which means "exalted father," to Abraham, which means "father of many nations." The great I AM who gave Abraham his promised son Isaac, is the same God who promises to take away our fears and provide for us.

God also established a covenant with each of us. Just as God established a personal relationship with Abram, God also comes to us. God has created a relationship with us through our baptism. When you were baptized, God gave you faith. It is through that faith that we, like Abraham, are declared righteous before God. Being declared righteous gives us an everlasting peace.

The righteousness we receive is the righteousness Christ earned for us with his life, death, and resurrection. God promised us a Savior and God sent us a Savior. It is because of God's faithfulness to his promise to save us that we can have confidence in all of God's other promises. Trusting God moves us from fear to faith. The God we trust is truly our shield and our very great reward.

It is because of our God-given faith that we can face our fears. Because God has established a relationship with us through Christ, we have a faith which is, in the words of the author of Hebrews: *sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see* (Heb 11:1).

### **We have a faith that sees the invisible.**

Faith does not have to see it to believe it. None of us were here to see God create the universe in six days – but do we believe it? None of us were here to see Jesus be born of a virgin – but do we believe it? None of us saw Jesus live, suffer, die, and rise – but do we believe it?

Jesus told Thomas: *Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed* (Jn 20:29). As God strengthens our faith through Word and Sacrament, we learn to trust him even though we can't always see the fulfillment of every promise.

### **We have a faith that believes the incredible.**

God promised Abraham that he would be the father of so many descendants that they would be like the stars in the sky. To fully understand this promise you must look at the nighttime desert sky. To grasp the incredible in this promise you must remember that Abraham was 100 years old and his wife Sarah was 90. The promise was incredible but Abraham believed and God came through.

God calls us to trust him for our future and believe his promises, even though they might seem incredible. Our history with God teaches us to trust him for the incredible. After all, it's incredible that God should love us when he knows how sinful we are – but he does. It's incredible that God would sacrifice his only Son for such rebellious people as us – but he did. And it's incredible that, no matter what the circumstances, God is our shield and our great reward – but he is.

Sometimes we are like the grandpa who took his first airplane ride at the age of 90. He went up in a private plane that circled the city for about 20 minutes and then landed. When he was back on the ground, his grandchildren asked, "Well, Grandpa, what did you think of the ride?" Grandpa replied, "It was fine, but I never put my full weight down on that blasted thing?"

That's how we treat God sometimes. We aren't quite sure we can put our full weight, our full trust, on him. But God wants our complete trust no matter how great our fear might be. It's when we fully trust God that our fear shrinks and we learn we can believe in the incredible.

### **We have a faith that receives the impossible.**

In human terms, there is no way a man of 100 with a wife of 90 would ever conceive a child much less give birth to a mighty nation – but it happened. If you look at all the sins you've ever committed, it might seem impossible that you would ever receive complete forgiveness – but if you believe in Christ as your Savior, that has happened, too. If God can make a nation out of an elderly couple, if God can forgive all your sins, then God can be trusted enough to remove all fear.

Do you see impossible hurdles in your path? Do you have impossible problems that look like they have come to stay? Do you have fears that you just can't conquer? If you do, then throw yourself on the mercy of God. God has given you the faith to trust him in every matter. So trust him. In his mercy, God has given you a faith that can receive

assurance and courage from him. So take it. When you do, you will have the faith that receives the impossible.

A man of great faith was asked, "If God promised in his Word to walk with you through a brick wall, would you try it?" "Absolutely," the man replied. "I would walk by faith and God would make a hole."

Sometimes the future looks like a brick wall. It certainly must have looked that way to Abraham and Sarah. But the great I AM who cared for them also cares for us. In the middle of our fears, God assures us and all of his people: *I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.* Because of our God we have a faith that sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible.