

**Where Are We Going?**  
**March 4 and 5, 2023**  
**Sermon Series “Questions of Lent”**  
**Second in a Series of Seven**

- **February 26 - God asking Adam and Eve, “Where Are You?”**
- **Today - Abraham’s family asking God, “Where Are We Going?”**
- **March 12 - Moses asking the people of Israel, “Why Do You Quarrel?”**
- **March 19 - Disciples asking Jesus, “Why Was This Man Born Blind?”**
- **March 26 - Ezekiel asking, “Can These Bones Live?”**
- **Palm Sunday - “Why Bend Our Knees?”**

**Genesis 12:1 - Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”**

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

Perhaps you remember the story of Alice, who was lost in Wonderland, and not sure which road to take. She asked the Cheshire Cat, “*Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?*” The Cat answered, “*That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.*” Alice said, “*I don’t much care where.*” To which the cat replied, “*Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.*”

Or perhaps you have heard a story about Albert Einstein, as told by Billy Graham. *Einstein was traveling from Princeton on a train. The conductor came down the aisle and was punching the tickets of every passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket, then in his trouser pockets, but couldn’t find his ticket. He looked in his briefcase, in the seat next to him, and under his seat, but it was nowhere to be found. The conductor recognized Einstein and assured him that he wasn’t to worry, he was sure he bought a ticket. The conductor moved down the aisle and continued to punch the tickets. When he looked back, he saw Einstein still searching high and low for his ticket. He went back and reassessed Einstein that he knew who he was and that he didn’t need a ticket. To which the famous scientist replied, “Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don’t know is where I’m going.”*

In today’s Old Testament lesson, the Lord God invited a well-to-do cattle man named Abram to pick up stakes, to leave his father’s household and move to a new land. We can imagine the questions that were swirling in the hearts of everyone involved, “Where are we going? How far away will we be traveling? What roads will we be traveling? What’s the five year plan? And the list goes on. To which

the Lord simply replied, “Go to the land I will show you.” Another way of saying, “I’ll tell you when we get there.” And underneath it all, and as we see the Old Testament narrative unfold, our Lord’s great desire was for His people to trust Him along the way.

The author of Genesis, who is Moses, devotes no fewer than 12 chapters to the life of Abraham and Sarah and their descendants. Why so much attention to this one marriage and family? Two reasons. The first is that God chose Abram to become the father of a new nation, which would be the cradle of the Savior. And the second reason is that the way God dealt with Abraham is typical of the way God deals with all sinners in every generation.

***Two parts to our sermon today - first we explore three of God’s specific promises to Abraham, and secondly, three of God’s specific promises to us.***

As we explore a cluster of promises God gave Abram, we notice that each blessing would be accompanied by a hard reality.

*The first promise that God was training Abram was that his offspring would eventually occupy the Promised Land. The hard reality was that the journey would not be easy.*

It wouldn’t be easy to leave his household and go to a place unknown. It wouldn’t be easy when they found their way to Shechem in the land of Canaan and there were all kinds of people already inhabiting the land. It wouldn’t be easy as Abraham realized they would have to displace these people and actually the promise of land would be fulfilled not in his lifetime. It wouldn’t be easy when a famine in the land forced them to move to Egypt for a while as a way of surviving. It wouldn’t be easy when Abram found it necessary to lie about Sarai being his sister instead of his wife / it wouldn’t be easy when Sarai was taken into the Pharaoh’s palace under false pretenses / it wouldn’t be easy when Abram had to depend on the goodwill of neighboring landowners for water and grazing rights, and the list goes on and on.

It wouldn’t be easy when for the next 20 plus years he and Sarah remained unable to have a child. It wouldn’t be at all easy when God tested Abraham by insisting that he offer up his one and only son as a bloody sacrifice. No doubt Abram kept on asking, “Where are we going?” and “How much farther?” And what’s the plan here? To which God replies, “Will you trust me?” And we hear the Holy Spirit whispering, “Keep on putting one foot in front of the other.”

**Promise #2 to Abram is that God would make of him a great (nation)** And the hard reality that came along with that is that the plan would require him and his wife to believe in the miraculous. They would be well past their child bearing years before God fulfilled this promise that they would bear a son. God's plan for their family to multiply into a great nation would require decades and even centuries to come to fruition. The road would not at all be smooth or easy to travel. Famines would have to be endured before there could be years of plenty. Centuries of slavery would need to be survived before there could be freedom. 40 years of wandering in the wilderness would be part of their basic training. Military defeats would be mixed in with the victories. No doubt their descendants would often ask, "how much farther?" and "why do we have to go this way?" and "where are we going" to which God kept on replying "Will you trust me?" And the Spirit kept whispering, "Keep on putting one foot in front of the other.

**Promise #3 to Abraham is that all nations would be blessed through his (Descendent), and the hard reality that came along with that promise is that along the way there would be folks cursing and persecuting and opposing them.**

This is the best promise of all, of course. That God so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. That no matter how often you may have taken God's grace for granted, His love for you is deep and it is wide and it is long and it is without condition. No matter how miserably you may have failed the tests life has thrown your way, Jesus Christ never failed. He was tempted in every way that you were, yet without sin. In Him, there is forgiveness of sins. And wherever there is forgiveness of sins, there is life. And not just a little bit of life once in a while, here and there. Jesus **came that you may have life and have it abundantly!**

Which brings us to the second part of our sermon - three promises that are part of the abundant Christian life. *Three promises God would make to us as individuals and to us collectively, here at Faith Lutheran. Three promises that answer the question, Where are we going?*

**Promise #1 is that heaven is our (home).** As many of you know, when I was 14 years old, my 20 year old brother Curtis was killed in a one car accident, September 5, 1968, in the Sheyenne River near Kindred, North Dakota. As the years went on and God blessed me with a wonderful wife, as God blessed me with healthy children and grandchildren, as God blessed me with friends and a ministry that I enjoy almost all of the time, I often felt bad for Curtis who missed out on all of that. He missed out on marriage, he missed out on having kids and grandkids,

he missed out on baptisms and confirmations and graduations and so many good times, and I felt bad for him. But as often as I remembered that he was already in the presence of Christ, that to depart and be with Christ is far better, that to die is gain, well, then I realized what I invite you all to remember today - the good old days have not passed us by, they are yet to come. We are in fact but strangers here, heaven is our home.

Even though Alice in Wonderland didn't know where she was going, and Albert Einstein wasn't really sure where he was going, and even though many of our friends and neighbors aren't certain, we are. By faith, we know that cancer and heart disease and hospice programs and caskets and urns and funeral homes and cemeteries don't get the final word. Jesus Christ gets the final word, and oh how sweet that word will be, **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”**

**Promise #2 is that as we travel along the narrow and winding road of salvation, we're part of a large (family).** Paul verifies what it means to be in a large family called the Holy Christian Church when he writes to the Galatians, **“Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.** Jesus verifies the same truth in Matthew 12 when he asks, **“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”** **49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”**

Many of you may well have come here this morning feeling a bit alone, perhaps unnoticed, even unloved. In 2017, the U.S. census reported that over 45% of adults over the age of 18 are single. That compares to 28% in 1960. Single folks, of course, don't have a corner of feeling alone and unappreciated. Some of us are putting in hours and effort nobody else seems to be seeing. Others of us may feel like our brand of Christianity is unloved in America.

But the promise of Jesus Christ is that He is with you always, even to the end of the age. He is with you, dear friends, in the preaching and teaching and remembering of God's Word. He is with you in the waters of Baptism and in the eating and the drinking of our Lord's Supper. He is with you in the fellowship of believers. As often as we cry with those who are crying and laugh with those who are laughing and listen to those who are pouring out their souls, Christ is with us. Here in the Church, our promise to one another is that we will weather the storms of life together. That we will travel through all of the thick and thin, all of the for better and for worse, as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

**Promise #3 is that as we travel through this roller coaster of life as the people of God, we do so with certainty that our enemies have been (defeated).** The devil and his demons are as nasty and as crafty as ever, but in the Garden of Gethsemane our Savior met up with them face to face, at the cross He defeated them once and for all, when He descended into hell, He declared a victory for the ages. Every day, we will wake up with a sinful nature that is weak and inclined towards repeating the same mistakes over and over again, but God's grace is stronger, His mercy is fresh, and His love is forever. As did Abraham, we will have our bad days, our good days, and our really good days.

On our bad days, we will doubt whether God is really in control, we will feel lost and even abandoned, and we will ask God again and again how much farther? And are you sure you know where we are going?

On our good days, we will believe the promises of God, and all that Christ has accomplished will be credited to our accounts.

On our really good days, friends and family will be looking to us for directions, and we will be pointing them again and again to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith. Amen