

**SERMON**  
**St. John's Episcopal Church**  
**Youth Sunday ~ March 4, 2012**  
**Mr. Sam Roller**  
**Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

I speak to you today in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Old Testament scripture today, Abraham makes a covenant with God. God appears to him and tells him that he will be made exceedingly fruitful, and that he will make nations of him. He also says that Abram (now Abraham)'s wife, now called Sarah, shall give birth to a son. Abraham responded to that promise, by laughing.

This laugh does not come without reason, however. God had made Abraham a few promises earlier in his life. For instance, in Genesis 12:7, God says "To your offspring I will give this land", speaking of Shechem. God continues the promise of land throughout Abraham's life, and sometimes speaking of Abraham's descendants, sometimes of him. To Abraham, it must have seemed a little bit strange, all this talk of large nations as he continued with only two sons. Despite this however, Abraham still has faith. Although his faith wavers every now and then, he is still faithful to God.

Today's scripture, to me, is a great example of faith. The following is a dictionary definition of faith. Faith is defined as a confidence or trust in a person or entity. That definition barely scratches the surface of what faith actually means. To have faith is easy sometimes, but other times it can be extremely difficult. For Abraham, faith was hard. He had difficulty believing that he would have descendants, although God keeps promising just that. Yet Abraham continues to do great things in the name of God. Faith is not a lighthearted confidence or trust, it is unbelievably more. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

In my life, God has always been present. Even when going to church was a chore every Sunday morning and even when I would fall asleep on the pews. God was there, watching over me. Last spring I attended a youth event called Happening in our diocese. Happening is a weekend retreat focused on you and your relationship with God. For me, that weekend was a roller-coaster of faith. We had a lot of time for personal reflection, and I definitely reflected. I was able to think about all of the bad things that have happened in my life and began to question where God was then. During that weekend, I began to feel his presence more than ever. It was like finding a toy or a book that I had forgotten about. I had to shake off the dust to be able to see it clearly.

After that weekend, I had a completely new outlook on God and on life itself. It was like God had sent me a postcard from some distance place saying simply "I'm thinking about you". I knew he was there and I wanted to be closer with him. Every now and then he

would revisit me, at a youth retreat or just when something great happened, and every time my heart would leap with joy. I was excited, yet I was at a very still, inner peace.

There have been moments where I have felt that same sort of peace in the past year, and moments where it has seemed like I might never feel it again. Recently, one of my good friends' dad passed away. He was a light in a dark room, and it didn't seem fair that he had to go. I wanted to know where God was when that happened, and why he didn't do anything to prevent his death.

About a week after he passed away, there was a beautiful funeral full of loved ones. It was a fantastic sight; people lined all the way around the church to help celebrate this man's life. It was in that church that I realized God was speaking to me through his own creation. The sunlight bursting through the windows, and the trees flowing in the breeze outside were outstanding indicators that he was there.

If you've ever played that game where you close your eyes, cross your arms and fall backwards into a friend's arms, you'll know exactly what I felt throughout this experience. For a short time, I felt like I was going to fall onto the ground, and that God had never really been there anyway. That feeling of vertigo soon gave way to a feeling of comfort within myself and with God. It was like my friend had caught me at just the right time, and I was safely away from the hard floor. That feeling of relief was overpowering, and it was just what I needed at the time.

That afternoon at the funeral reminded me of my favorite story about the man walking on the beach, watching his life. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, where he and God were walking together, but sometimes there was only one. The man asks God where he was during those times, and God responds simply, "I was carrying you." That story captures the constant ups and downs of faith. Sometimes we have to be carried through rough times in order to make it through, and it is rare that we recognize when our feet are off the ground.

Abraham's faith led him throughout his entire life, following God. Although our individual experiences with faith may not be as taxing as Abraham's, God is still there. God is still there. He walks with us through the happy, and carries us through the sad.