

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Trinity  
Genesis 15:1-6  
June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012

The place our family settled is called Haran. My father died in that town. His name was Terah. It wouldn't be long after that that the Lord would call to me and say, "*Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.*" In the same breath the Lord promised to make me a great nation, to bless me, to make my name great. Me, a great nation? How can this be? My wife was barren and I was 75 years old – and she was no spring chicken either.

But with God all things are possible. Good morning to you, my name is Abram. You perhaps know me by Abraham. God changed my name as a result of the promise given in the Old Testament text for today. My name Abram means exalted father (though I had fathered no children – ironic). But then God called me Abraham which means father of many (which is even more ironic – remember, no children here). But when God calls and He tells you you're going to be and do something great – one thing I found out – you better listen – because the Lord can do and does great and unexpected things – even for an old miserable sinner like myself.

I'll give you an example. The Lord told our family to pick up and move to a land which He has given to us – the land of Canaan. Well, wouldn't you know it, there was a famine in the land and so God took care of us and moved us to Egypt. I got scared and lied about Sarai, my wife. I told them she was my sister so they wouldn't kill me and take her. Even in the midst of my lies the Lord did not abandon me and He protected us. My nephew Lot got into some trouble with some locals and the Lord protected us again. I was able to rescue Lot from the hand of those who were threatening him, not far from where the Lord would give us the Promised Land. And now, here's where the Lord really showed his favor.

He said to me, and as you heard in the Old Testament text, "*Do not be afraid, I am your shield, your very great reward.*" My fear was that God would not give me what He promised. I was old, my wife could not have children – how was I going to be a father? I offered my servant named Eliezer as option for a son. I found for God – for me – an easy way out of this promise. But God wouldn't have it. The Lord said, "No," there will be a son for you from your very own body. He took me outside to show me the stars in the sky and said that my offspring will be like those stars that are so many I could not count them all. How glorious! How marvelous the news! How scary... and... how? How will God do this??

In the midst of my fears, in the midst of my questions, in the midst of my finding an easy way out for God by making my servant my son, God showed me something. He gave me something. And even though I would try to stand in the way of what God would do with all my ideas, my doubts, God gave me something. He gave me righteousness. I believed that God could do it – would do it. This was a gift from God.

Yes, I believe – in the midst of my fears. I believe – in the midst of my "lack of" understanding of how God could make this old man and my old wife into a great people. I believed – in the midst of my unbelief. You remember that man – the Gospels speak of him – who had a son and Jesus the Lord healed him. Jesus says, "*Everything is possible for him who believes.*" And the boy's father immediately replies, "*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.*" That man is just like me. That man, I would venture to guess, is just like you... a man... a woman... who has faith but wonders where it's at sometimes.

You're not that much different from me, I want you to understand. God takes people like me, a doubter, a liar, and He turns us into precious children with an inheritance we do not deserve. You are a lot like me and I want you to admit that you are. I know you because you are a lot like me – admit it – you are a poor miserable sinner. I want you to stand with faithful Saint Paul who told Timothy, "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.*" The worst who, for some reason

even though we know better, repeat the same sins over and over again. The worst, who act like there is no God. The worst, who believe no one is watching, no one will get hurt, no one will find out. You can stand with St. Paul and so can I. I know who you are because you are like me. Repent. Seek the Lord and His righteousness. Turn from those sinful ways and trust that the Lord makes good on promises to sinners. Ha – and I’m telling you?? I need to tell you, but I better be listening to myself on that one.

*“Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward.”* How could such a righteous God shield me? How could such a righteous God call me righteous? There is only one way. He counted it to me. That is He deemed it, He reckoned it, He added it to me. He put it in me – righteousness that is. This faith that I have is a righteous gift counted to me from God Himself. I am not worthy. I am old, I have no children, I have lied, I have not listened to the Lord, I can’t be righteous. Can I?

“Look up, Abraham,” says our Lord. “Look at the stars in the sky and try to number them if you can. Your children will be numbered the same.” In the midst of my fears and my questions and my “finding an easy way out for God to make good on His promise,” the Lord still blesses me. He blesses you as well.

And just look how He blesses you – look at this place right here. Look at that altar right over there. I know you have seen it many times and, perhaps, you take it for granted because it is such a mainstay here in this place you come to so often. But never take for granted that altar and this place. I remember one altar the Lord would have me build. It was after the Lord had blessed Sarah and I with our first and only son together, Isaac. And the Lord desired me to sacrifice Isaac to show my faith – this faith that I have that is present even when I feel like that father who had his son healed when I say to the Lord, *“I believe, help me in my unbelief.”* I took my only son to the top of a mountain at God’s command. I built an altar. I know what God wanted me to do – and I know that God makes good on promises but I wasn’t sure how. I put my son on that altar that I built. My son was to be the sacrifice. But I knew, God makes good on promises. I knew He would bless me with a people as numerous as the stars in the sky. I knew that even if I had to plunge that knife I had into my only son’s chest, the Lord would still make good on His promise. This was my only son and God said through my son He would make my offspring numerous. I didn’t understand how this was going to happen. I was just following orders.

The Lord stopped me. He commended my faith – a faith that comes along with fear and questions. He commended a faith that trusts that through my offspring a great nation shall come. And today it has. You are the great nation. Where I was stopped from thrusting that dagger into my son on the altar on Mount Moriah, your Heavenly Father allowed His only Begotten Son to die on a cross – for you. And now, our Lord’s very body and blood is with us in Holy Communion – on an altar. You are that great nation. You are sons and daughters of Abraham, sons and daughters of the Father. You are redeemed and made redeemable – by grace through faith. God redeemed me and accounted my faith as righteousness. Beloved, He does the same for you. Go to that redeeming altar of love and life. This is the place to be. There is life in this place. There is assurance in the midst of our fears. There is forgiveness for sinners like me, like St. Paul and like you.

I wanted to give God the easy way out of His promise to make me a great nation by showing Him that He could make my servant my son. I was too old. Thank God that God didn’t take the easy way out. He didn’t – even for you. Giving His Son was not easy. I know from experience. But that’s how much He loves you. You are His child. You are numbered among those He talks about in Genesis 15. Undeserved? Yes. But He never goes back on His promises. Thank God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.