

At Home Worship
February 28, 2021 Second Sunday in Lent
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God's creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

We are called to render our hearts and not our garments for the Lord.

For God has been gracious and merciful to us, and slow to anger.

Then let us seek the Lord that we might know and serve God.

But how shall we come before the Lord and what shall we bring?

Christ has shown us the way; bring your love, service, and praise!

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

O God, in Your infinite wisdom You have given us the witness of Christ to teach us Your will for our lives. We will stand boldly for You, Lord, and proclaim Your Good News to the world. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Lord Be Glorified " #2150

In our lives, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In our lives, Lord, be glorified today.
In our homes, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In our homes, Lord, be glorified today.
In your church, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In your church, Lord, be glorified today.
In your world, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In your world, Lord, be glorified today.

A Time of Confession and Assurance

Most merciful God, we confess how eager we are to turn the Gospel into a way of comfort and conquest, of security and success in the most worldly terms; and how easily we ignore the loss of life that Jesus experienced himself and taught as the way of discipleship. Forgive us our selfishness and deviousness, and make us ready to give ourselves to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
(silent prayer of personal confession).....Amen.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." We believe and although we fall short, we must persevere to the end. Hold tight to His Word. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Standing On the Promises" # 838 VSS. 1,2,4

1. Standing on the promises of Christ, my King, through eternal ages let his praises ring;
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing, Standing on the promises of God.

Refrain:

Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God, my Savior; Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.

2. Standing on the promises that cannot fail. When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail, Standing on the promises of God.

Refrain:

Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God, my Savior; Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.

4. Standing on the promises I cannot fall, listening every moment to the Spirit's call,
Resting in my Savior as my all in all, Standing on the promises of God.

Refrain:

Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God, my Savior; Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.

Never Too Old

Genesis 17:1-27

Let me ask a question of those of you of a certain age: Did you ever look around at a group of your peers and wondered to yourself if you look as old as they do?

I ask that because I heard of an older gentleman who was sitting in the reception room of a dentist's office. It was his first visit to see this dentist. While waiting for his appointment, he noticed a certificate hanging on a wall which bore the dentist's full name. Suddenly, he remembered that a slender, nice looking young woman with that name had been in his high school class some 50 years ago.

Upon seeing the dentist, however, he quickly discarded any such thought. This gray-haired lady with the deeply lined face was way too old to have been *his* classmate.

After she had examined his teeth, he mentioned a certain school and asked if by chance she had gone to that school. "I sure did," she replied.

"When did you graduate?" he asked.

She answered, "In 1965. Why do you ask?"

"You were in my class!" he exclaimed.

She squinted her eyes and looked at him real closely and then asked, "What subject did you teach?"
[We laugh to keep from crying, don't we?]

Our lesson for today from the book of Genesis begins like this: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, (that's pretty old, wouldn't you agree) the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God

Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

Ninety-nine years old! But this was not the first time that God asked something from Abram or Abraham, as we know him. It is said that Jewish history began with a command to Abraham which he received from God to leave the country in which he was born and to go “to the land I will show you.” That happened in Genesis 12. Abraham believed God. God said, “Take up your family and go.” Abraham went. That was the kind of faith Abraham had. And it was that faith that gave birth to the nation of Israel.

In today’s lesson, God challenges Abraham’s faith with even more of a fantastic promise. God tells Abraham that Sarah, his aging wife, will bear him a son. Remember he was 99 and Sarah was 89. Abraham laughed at first. Wouldn’t you? He asked God how could it be that a woman of 90 and a man of 100 could become parents? But again, he believed God. Paul tells us that Abraham “hoped against hope” that the message was true. And Abraham moved forward with faith.

As we consider Abraham’s example, we see what faith really is. **Faith is a dynamic, forward looking relationship with God.** Faith is not sitting on your hands waiting for God to perform a miracle in your behalf. Faith is a matter of movement. It is a matter of achievement. It is a matter of reaching out for a miracle. It is a matter of obedience to God’s commands.

There is a humorous story about Bob Zuppke, the colorful former Hall of Fame football coach at the University of Illinois.

Zuppke was trying to get his team prepared to play the University of Iowa. “Men,” he roared, “I want you to get in there and die for Illinois. Nobody will be taken out unless he’s dead. Get that? Unless he’s DEAD!”

The inspired but overmatched Illinois team played Iowa to a standstill until late in the fourth quarter when they finally ran out of gas. In fact, one of the frail Illinois halfbacks literally keeled over from exhaustion. Zup grabbed one of his younger players and yelled, “Get in there and replace that man!”

The youth with fear and trepidation dashed out to where the exhausted man lay—then came right back to the sidelines. “What’s wrong?” shouted Zuppke. “Why didn’t you take that man’s place like I told you?”

“It ain’t necessary, Coach,” gulped the youngster. “He’s still breathing a little.” (1) Well, after all, he wasn’t dead! The young man had taken his coach’s pep talk to heart, but he didn’t follow his instructions. Christ needs people today who will obey his instructions to love and to serve and to give. We are not simply to be passive spectators. We are to get into the game of life as warriors for Christ’s kingdom.

Many Christians miss this truth. For many, faith is a cautious, cloistered type of experience in which one seeks, first of all, not to ripple the waters. But that is faith in its weakest form. Faith involves risk. Faith involves moving out. Faith involves setting our eyes on a lofty goal.

In other words, there is such a thing as being too careful. We miss the exhilaration of life when we refuse to venture out, to do things on faith, to stretch for that which is beyond our grasp.

Someone else has commented on the fact that so many of our attitudes about life are expressed in cautious, negative terms. For instance, the weather person gives the weather and says, “Tomorrow there will be a 20% chance of rain.” He never says, “There will be an 80% chance of sunshine.”

When you are giving directions to somebody on the street, you will say, “Go down here to the third red light.” Fifty percent of the time that light is going to be green. However, we never say, “Go to the third green light.” Faith has a positive outlook. Faith is being willing to heed God’s command regardless of how daunting a task may be.

Abraham is an example of what faith is all about. Faith involves moving out. Faith involves setting our eyes on a lofty goal.

Here is the second thing to be said. **People with the faith of Abraham are the achievers in this world.** People of faith are those who enlarge our horizons, champion our causes, who move humanity forward. They inspire the rest of us.

Presbyterian pastor Stephen Janssen tells about Sir Alexander Fleming, a Scottish physician and microbiologist, who won the Nobel Prize for medicine when he discovered penicillin. As most of you are aware, Fleming made this discovery quite by accident. One day he happened to notice that the fungus on a certain glass plate had died when it came into contact with some mold that was on the same plate. Fleming was a very positive, forward-looking person who followed up on his observations. Most people would just wash off mold. We usually don’t see much good coming from mold that we find on something.

Out of curiosity, Fleming took a bit of the mold and cultured it for further study.

Out of his work back in 1928 came penicillin, the most widely used antibiotic in the world. The result—Alexander Fleming found a way to treat formerly severe and life-threatening illnesses such as pneumonia and meningitis.

It is important for us as Christian people to see that Christian faith is not a static, passive, non-threatening style of life. Jesus was a doer. He was a person who was so outspoken that he aroused envy, bitterness and hatred. If he were a quiet, nice little person sitting in the corner doing no harm, he would never have been crucified.

Christian faith is a dynamic, forward looking relationship with God. People of faith are the doers in this world, the achievers, those who enlarge our horizons. Christ is our example.

But there is one last thing to be said: **The greatest acts of faith in this world involve our relationships with others.**

You may be familiar with the name Philippe Petit. Petit is a French high-wire artist who gained fame when he walked a high-wire strung between the lofty towers of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris in 1971. Some of you may remember that, in 1974, he pulled off the same stunt with a high-wire walk stretched between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. As thousands watched below, Petit made seven crossings of a cable stretched 1,350 feet above the traffic and concrete of Manhattan—dancing, spinning, grinning, even lying down in the middle his lofty cable.

Even today Phillipe Petit is not afraid to take risks. In fact, he says that he does not see wire walking as risky. He has rehearsed his antics on the high wire so many times that he feels safe there.

There is one thing, however, that absolutely terrifies Phillipe Petit. He says, “Some risks I find impossible to take—particularly personal risks with people—for example, marriage, or having children.”

Did you get that? Getting married and having children are scarier to this wire-walker than crossing a tiny cable 1,350 feet in the air.

You and I take such relationships for granted. Maybe Petit’s unusual fear will cause us to think about our relationships. What greater risk is there than trusting your life to another person until “death do us part.” That is an enormous leap of faith. Sometimes we are so gooey eyed with romance that we don’t think through the implications of the step we are taking. If we did there would be far less divorces.

Then there is the risk of having children. There are some people who choose not to have children for a variety of reasons, and that’s fine. But it would be sad if we chose that course simply because we are afraid to risk the hurt and the pain that are inevitable in all important relationships. After all, such relationships also bring great joy.

However, Phillipe Petit helps us to put life into perspective and to realize that these are the greatest risks—these common, ordinary events that most of us never analyze, never think through.

But there is a risk greater than any of the others. That is the leap of faith that Abraham took—a leap of faith in God.

Sheila Cassidy in her book *Audacity to Believe* tells of being arrested in Chile years ago on trumped up charges after treating a wounded revolutionary. She was arrested and held without trial in a detention camp.

She was finally found guilty of a minor infraction but still was held in the detention camp. She was given by a doctor a copy of the New Testament. Leafing through it, she came to that passage in Romans where Paul asks, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? No. In all of these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Sheila writes, “Incredibly, in the midst of fear and loneliness, I was filled with joy, for I knew without any vestige of doubt that God was with me, and that nothing they could do would change that.”

Perhaps you are a person who has always kept God at a distance—who has been reluctant to trust God with your life. Let me invite you to experience an exhilarating new adventure.

Faith is not accepting a handful of propositions and saying “Oh yes, I believe. Now I am saved. Now I am bound for the promised land.” That is a pale imitation of the real thing. The real thing is

when you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord and you seek to live courageously and victoriously for him in this world—staking everything you are and hope to be on his eternal purpose and promise—like Abraham hoping against hope that the message of an eternal covenant is true. That is real faith. That is the kind of faith that can turn a world upside down.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn

“I Sing the Mighty Power of God”

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1. We sing the mighty power of God that made the mountains rise, that spread the flowing seas abroad and built the lofty skies. We sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule the day; the moon shines full at his command, and all the stars obey.

2. We sing the goodness of the Lord that filled the earth with food; he formed the creatures with his word and then pronounced them good. Lord, how your wonders are displayed, where'er we turn our eyes, if we survey the ground we tread or gaze upon the skies.

3. There's not a plant or flower below but makes your glories known, and clouds arise and tempests blow by order from your throne; while all that borrows life from you is ever in your care, and everywhere that we can be, you, God, are present there.

Blessing

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. 2 Corinthians 13:13