

Abraham is one of the superheros of the Bible. The reason is not that he is strong. You may recall that Samson was strong. And he was a hero! But Samson's physical strength ultimately got him in real trouble. He tended to think he could do anything, handle anything, control everything, and therein ultimately lay his descent to a dark and painful time. Abraham was not strong. And he certainly was not perfect. Nor was he courageous. The idea of his trying to convince his wife (Sarah was beautiful....what husband does not think his wife is beautiful?) Abraham tried to convince his wife to tell their unbelieving hosts in foreign lands that she was his sister. Abraham was forthright in his stating that he hoped as a result their host would not kill him to have her as an additional wife. Says something about Abraham as a husband, I think.

So what was Abraham's virtue that qualifies him to be one of the really big people in the Bible? It is this: when it came to God, Abraham was a believer. Not always consistent. It is a good question to ask, where was all that faith when he wants to pass Sarah off as a sister, rather than saying, I am sorry Bud but she is spoken for and taken. Nonetheless, when God spoke to Abraham, the man recognized God's voice. And what is more he acted on what God said. And he refused to be deterred from the trail upon which God set him, or the task God had given him.

God said, Abraham I am going to give you a land. A good and rich land. So pack up Sarah and your flocks and herds, your family and your goods and your tent and follow me and I will show it to you. No map. No revelation of the final destination. No video of the land before they got there. Just an invitation. Follow me. We go this way for now. Abraham believed God and he followed where

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God led with all its challenges. With all its difficulties. With all its trials. There were numbers of times when Abraham was afraid, and afraid for his life. But he believed God and he followed God and the Scripture says that God counted it (his faith) that God counted it to him for righteousness. That means Abraham's faith counted with God more than his sometimes shabby behaviour. \That he believed was more important to God than Abraham's behaviour. In other words there is no question that Abraham did not earn favour with God unless it was in this...that he believed what

God said about the land and the journey toward it.

Paul takes up this point when he writes, “therefore the promise comes by faith.” That Israel existed as a nation in the ancient history of the middle east, is not a result of what people did, but of what people believed. Specifically that they believed God's word to them. There is a degree to which the modern mind handles that a little bit like the facial expression where one eyebrow is higher than the other. It means “Really”/ And you have to underline not the word, but the question mark. The tone of voice indicates doubt. The question mark means,...it can't be that easy. I have surely missed something, missed a step, there has to be more.

Yesterday I attended a prayer breakfast (my description of the activity) at St. Columba Church. It is a gathering of men. They do not gather to pray as an activity. They gather to eat breakfast, cooked by several of the members of the group. Yes, one of the men prays, says grace, before we are allowed to devour the eggs and bacon, toast and coffee...with orange juice if you want it. And following that meal, there is always a speaker,,not necessarily from the church. Yesterday it happened to be two men from the AA group that is permitted to meet in the Church facilities.

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This was a new experience for me. The two men who I will call John and Adam had come to address us on 2 matters. The first, was to say thank you for our generosity in letting them meet in the church, which they have literally done for ldecades. As long as people could remember. They reminded us in case we had forgotten (I am not sure anyone had even considered this reality) that our generosity had not only benefited the community of Belleville, because some citizens had found sobriety through the programme AA offers, our generosity had not only benefited those individuals or their families. But over the years they estimated thousands of lives had been touched by the ripple affect of the victories over alcohol addiction that had been achieved. It was shared with us that 50 % of those who walked into an open meeting found their way to sobriety. And of those who did not another 50 % would eventually find their way there over the following period of years.

Adam shared with us a number of aspects about the AA programme. He was open and convinced that they key to success of the

programme, the stumbling block for those who fail, the stumbling block for those initially fail but ultimately achieve sobriety is always the same...and he is one of those who walked away from AA a number of times before he won his battle with the disease and the addiction. He said it always hinges on the ability of the individual to recognize the reality of God and the truth that as individuals we are not in control of our circumstances...even when we think we are. He was saying the programme is faith based. He was saying that for those who can find faith in a loving forgiving God, even if that faith is as small as a grain of mustard seed, the miracle of normal life, life beyond addiction becomes possible.

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And of course the Bible has proclaimed that reality since the beginning of time. It is what defines Abraham as a Biblical hero, and one of the greatest of the greats. The way is by faith. If Israel stumbled, it stumbled because its culture began to value the traditions of men more than the word of God. Its people began to boast in human accomplishment, rather than spending time in prayer, and following where God was leading them. The New Testament introduces us to Jesus, the man in whom God is perfectly revealed. And what does he do? He follows the Father faithfully even to the cross of Calvary in order that millions of people might come to faith and be saved from their sins. Not because of what they did...but by the grace of God.

The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace, and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring. Paul has no hesitation to say of us as Christians, himself included, we are the offspring, the children of Abraham. The Christian faith is first of all about faith, about belief, about faith in God. That is indeed why we have so many Creeds and statements of faith. Whenever the Church recognized it was facing a significant challenge (and this world is always challenging the belief community) there was a new concerted and focussed effort to state in a new way, in new words what has always been essential about the Christian faith.

Here is the thing we sometimes lose sight of. All this talk about faith is an attempt to put the focus where the focus should always

be. And the focus should always be not on us...but on the God whom we serve. The Father who is father to Jesus, and in this matter of believing, father to us all. The Creator who has created us and led us to Himself. This God who is in Christ from the beginning,

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however science may ultimately come to understand the beginning was. This God who was in Jesus because He is Jesus and still the Father. This God who is with us and in us in the person of God's Spirit. He is God's Spirit and therefore He is obviously the Holy Spirit.

Can you see, that as soon as we put the focus on the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come, we need to recognize what we receive is received by grace. Fancy language which simply means our salvation from sin, our being forgiven is the result of one ultimate decision...God decided to give it to us. I love The Sound of Music. I loved the movie when it was made years and years ago. I have seen it on the stage done by little theater groups, I saw it done by High School students in Pickering and this month I saw it in Stratford done by professional actors, dancers, singers and musicians. But there is a mistake in The Sound of Music...Maria and her future husband Captain Von Trapp sing..."Here I am standing here, loving you/ Whether or not I should/ Somewhere in my wicked childhood and youth/ I must have done something good." It is good poetry. It may even be the best of theatre, but it is not Biblical theology. Good things happen to us because God is God. It is grace. A gift. A gift that only faith can recognize.

We are part of the offspring of Abraham. The promise of salvation has come to us by faith. And when we see clearly, and grasp the Biblical word we are forced to celebrate that salvation is the gift of God to His children.

Let us pray:

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Dear Jesus, in many ways we will never understand the cross and the death you suffered there for us. Help us to grasp this and to hold to it as firmly as can be, that in your love, you give us the gift of life. In

your love you give us the gift of life eternal. Help us to receive it and treasure it not as some privilege earned, but according to your word...by grace... . The best gift. Amen