



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Second Sunday in Lent

February 25, 2018

The Promise is Secure

Mark 8:31-38

Each of us has a narrative; the story line that underlies our lives and is most often renewed in some way each day. Imagine your narrative, your story. Think with me...

- In what town were you born? (Spokane)
- What is a key characteristic of your first five years of life? (A strong nuclear family)
- What was your highpoint in high school? (Highlander)
- What was your first remembered religious experience? (First Baptist Church --- oak!)
- What did you want to be when you grew up? (A lawyer, politician)
- What did you do when you grew up? (Haven't yet!)

Each of us have a narrative; a story of the good, the bad, and the not so...people, met, challenges overcome, the cycle of life.

For most of us the narrative has been mostly good and is still evolving. And this is true, even today, the Lord's Day, where the narrative is renewed in pretty clear ways as we celebrate the God we dare call our own through the life, death, resurrection, and ongoing life of Jesus in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Holy Trinity, we are sealed and THE PROMISE IS SECURE!

1. Of old... True or False?

Abram and Sarai had a narrative. They were nomads, tribal, and, well OLD. At a time when they were probably thinking of retiring, slowing down, hanging out with the kids and grandkids---oops, they had neither! They came face to heart with the LORD in a time of promise. Oh, he was 99.

On the way, at a life junction, the LORD (get the name!) appeared and made a promise. It was pretty clear: God Almighty, walk, you will be blameless, a promise/covenant I will make, offspring...Not surprising...God struck Abram, now Abraham, "I will make you fruitful, there will be offspring after you."

I would have said, "Whoever you are, [flat on my face]. You have to be kidding. How will I tell Sarai?" "Not to worry," says the LORD, her name shall be Sarah, I will bless her, a son will come to you, I will bless her, nations will rise from her."

Imagine taking that word to your aged, barren wife. Recall that she laughed, but the promise was (and IS) secure. It is true! And their narrative suddenly met a pivot point of transition, transformation, a new learning of trust, and they did it together.

2. In Christ.

If you read the narrative of the First Testament you find that the underlying one is clear, the promise is secure, but there were whole lot of tipping points, strengths (Moses), weaknesses (King David), opportunities (prompted by the Prophets), and threats (almost every time God had to work with sinful human beings, curved in upon themselves) who needed to repent and learned that the God who named them would never let them go, ever.

The promise secure in Christ! And it was Paul who made the point. Saul, renamed Paul (get the trend? New life, new name!) who had not always been favorable to those who claimed Jesus, the Messiah as Savior and Lord.

Paul puts Abraham and Sarah; casts of folk who prepared the way of the Lord. Those who learned to live by the "righteousness of faith." Or, trust and obey for there is no other way!

Grace through faith alone...sound Lutheran! You bet it is! Look to Abraham and Sarah as "faith mentors and models." Amidst the narrative of their lives, in the ups and downs, the valleys and mountain tops, they walk in the LORD.

Hope against hope, this old crock of humanity! "He did not weaken (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb (I can get that, can't you?). No, NO distrust made him waver concerning the PROMISE OF GOD, but he grew strong in faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what God had promised."

And the grace that held onto him, to them, even to giving the power of faith/trust "was accounted/reckoned to him as righteousness" But, here is the point: "It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification."

What a friend we have in Jesus who makes us to be the offspring of Abraham and Sarah. And heirs to the benefits of their trust and the grace given to each one of in Christ. Imagine it! We are the brothers and Sisters of Isaac, the offspring of two old crocks who place their trust in the Lord.

What do you think? How will you live?

So, Jesus is getting closer to Jerusalem. Time seems to be running out. He begins to arm his disciples with the truth and will do so three times.

The look is not so good by human standards: great suffering, rejected by the religious power block (elders, chief priests, scribes---a holy trinity!), killed, "after three days rise again."

And Peter, in effect, says, "This is not what we signed up for, by the way." And Jesus said, in impact, "Follow me again. This is the divine plan!"

Then, Jesus had a tutorial on what it means to be discipleFIT! And even included the "crowd." I take that to be you and to be me!

"Follow me, if you would, give up your own agendas, wear the cross and follow me. Give up your self-centered way for the sake of gospel."

As if to engage us anew in the grace given, which includes the faith and trust, that we learn anew that Jesus is the WAY INTO THE TRUTH THAT IS LIFE! That priceless grace!

The questions of commitment are for us this day at the intersections of life, in worship. To the question of Joshua: "Who will you serve? As for me and my house we will serve the LORD!" How will your narrative of faith be made new today?

To each of us this Lord's Day, it is as if Jesus was saying, simply, "Follow me."

I believe that the narrative of our lives is given in three distinct words---a walking place for each one of us and the community of faith that engages us in mission and in ministry---

1. En-vision. We are given the opportunity to imagine a future possibility that moves beyond the limits of our lifetime. That is the meaning of Jesus' call to His own. To see in His life, a love that will not let us go and models a servant form for our days.

It is a sense of all that the Church has done in history. To establish a colony of heaven on earth where we share the vision that we might BE THE LIFE that draws other into the redemption we have in Christ Jesus. And that means victory over all things that claims us forever.

2. En-fold. The word literally means "to swaddle." We are given the opportunity to draw others into a community that invites all people into the circle of our life together. I challenge us to continue to be an inviting community and to open wide the arms of this congregation again and again to become part of a vibrant people who are change makers in the world. Ever invited someone to join you at worship, in service, in the life of Saint Andrew's? In the last *VOICE* newsletter, I counted over 50 points of entry! Waiting to be shared as you, as we, witness to Christ.
3. En-act. We have the opportunity to perform a mission and to stage a place where the action of the Holy Spirit can work to build the family of God. It is to walk our talk! To make visible to all that we are in Christ, living on the firm foundation of grace alone that guides into the action which becomes the Velcro, connection in time, to the eternal time of our lives in Christ.

We live out of the promise that is secure. And just as "Abraham" means "father of a multitude." And just as "Sarah" means, "mother of all the races /princess/ woman of power."

We are the heirs, offspring of the promise from the woman of power. In that sense we are part of a people of renewal as what Paul once called "the bride of Christ," the Church.

This day we are seed sowers anew of the Gospel. Those who live out of the Cross into the world. That is the sense of Lent, holy spring...to find our foundation for mission where it belongs --- beneath the Cross of Jesus where God's wondrous love keeps the promise secure forever.

So Christian walk this pilgrim road, though anxious fears beset you.

The One who sees and guides your way will not forsake, forget you.

The cross that seems so heavy now will be the frame that bears you.

Through pain and death Christ won the life for which he now prepares you.

And can it be? And can it be?

Amazing love, how can it be?

FOR YOU...AND FOR ME.

What do you think? How will you live? AMEN!