

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 17, 2019 (Lent 2)

Here we stand with Abram, at our points of unknowing where our faith grows stronger because of our uncertainty. We want to know how the future will play out. We want to know. But faith does not offer guarantees for what **we** value. Faith is assurance that we live in the presence of God. Faith is an invitation to trust and to live in trust because we cannot lose when we live in God's welcome and care. God's unconditional welcome replaces our fragile, clenched-fist security with a grounding that is secure and free indeed. Abram learned this. We are learning it too.

There stands Abram, with no heir, no home, no future. Abram is anxious. ?Who will carry on everything which he has worked so hard to create? Abram's world is fragile and he wants everything to go just so. But this "just so" world is not faith. This "just so" world is precariously anxious.

Abram's faith grows, his anxiety declines not as he gets it right or figures out how to keep and secure everything that *he* values. No, we know it doesn't work that way, no matter how hard we try. Abram's faith grows as his trust grows. And that is *such* a slow process of prayer, visions, failures, more failure, and more failures until he finally gives up and trusts. Faith is a tough road.

Put simply, Abram learns that the only thing that matters is what is. Yes, he has hopes and dreams. But even when they come to pass, he learns to be willing to walk away from all of them, if necessary. Even after he has a son, he trusts God beyond his son. He holds his son Isaac as a *gift* of faith rather than a *prize* for his faith. Isaac is not a *reward* but a *gift* to be received and held with open hands.

Many of the texts in Genesis about Abraham are about God's promises to Abraham and Abraham's failures to trust. Abraham learns faith not because he is a good person, but because he learns everything the hard way. Wisdom comes through failure not through brilliance. He learns to trust not because he is good at it, but because he runs out of options otherwise.

He is never going to have a child to hold unless he gives up trying. His fatherhood, Sarah's motherhood veers into the realm of the impossible. They let go. Then we hear Abraham and Sarah laughing at the promise and coming fulfillment of a child." The impossible promise, the impossible faith, the impossible gift, the impossible trust.

Over and over he and Sarah learn that the only life livable is the life of trust.

This is the important part. Not only are they learning to trust for what they desperately want, but they are willing to trust that they can give up on what they desperately want. They let it all go. And they could have died childless and that would have been ok. But there is Isaac. And he is a gift. No guarantee. Just a gift.

Faith is about unimaginable gift which is born of deep trust. Faith is about lots of failures inviting that trust because we with Abraham, learn to give up on everything but what is. And what is, is a gift. That is faith.

We are tempted to give up on faith because of the uncertainty surrounding the fulfillment of God's promises. As with Abram we will press on into the unknown not because we are good, but because we have no choice after all our failures in faith teach us to trust God for whatever is left. The only other option is to despair. To give up all hope that love is working itself out in this universe created and sustained by the mysteries of God. If that happens it is a failure of prayer. It is a doomed insistence that you and I must understand and hold the keys.

Faith is letting go of the understanding and the keys. When we do that and open ourselves, then the gift of faith, the gift of salvation, the gift of walking with God. . .is ours. So simple. So desperate. So beautiful. But don't be deceived, the journey into true faith moves through many dark valleys. The Gospel of Jesus Christ requires no secret knowledge, just a willingness to be honest, and to follow where we are led. Amen.