

Lent 2C'19

17 March 2019 (Abraham and Patrick)

Gen.15.1-12, 17-18; Ps.27; Luke 13.31-35

St. Luke's Episcopal Church

North Little Rock, Arkansas

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God, the strength of all who believe in you, increase our faith and trust in your son, that we may live victoriously now and forever. Amen. - From the New Zealand Prayer Book

To live a life without faith means that we live life on our own terms, with only our five senses; what we can touch, taste, see, hear, and smell, and with only our own limited resources to rely upon. When we aren't living our lives in faith, we live by the old adage, "*Seeing is believing*" and we say things like *'I won't believe it until I see it!'* The former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple got it right when he said "*the opposite of faith isn't doubt, the opposite of faith is certainty!*" If we could be 100% certain about what we were facing we wouldn't need faith. To live life by faith is to live by our 6th sense, in a world of uncertainty by trusting in God who is certain. To live a life of faith, rather than saying "*Seeing is believing*", we say, "Believing is seeing," 'I won't see it until I believe it!' First comes belief and then we see God come through. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*"

That's the way it reads in the New Revised Standard Version, but I still prefer the old King James Version,

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”¹

In the reading from Genesis today we learn of a man named Abram or Abraham as he eventually would be called. He is referred to as the Father of the three largest world religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He is the common ancestor of all who place their trust in God. In Abraham we see the first example of what a life of faith looks like. In Genesis 12 we find that his journey of faith began with a call from God: *“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation...”²* He had no knowledge of the land he was being led to, he had no connections with the strangers who lived there, he had no command of their language, and by the way, he was impotent and his wife Sarah was in her 90's, so good luck with that childbirth thing!

All he had to carry with him was a promise from God who said that he would give him this land, and that he and his wife would produce children and from these children God would make a great nation. So, we see in

¹ Hebrews 11.1 NRSV & KJV

² Genesis 12.1-2a

the journey of faith there is the Call from God, then the doubt that arises from the uncertainty of the destination, the apparent lack of resources, and the improbability of success.

Next comes the critical decision to either step out in faithful trust or to stay put, pull the plug on the journey, stagnate, and miss out on the blessing from God that would have been abundant. Abraham takes the step of faith and heads toward the land of promise. He believes, obeys, and then he sees the promise be fulfilled. This was the first journey of faith ever and all the faith journeys that have followed throughout the centuries have involved the same pattern: First comes the Call – Then Obstacles/Doubt is encountered- in spite of these Trust is placed in God– and then comes the Fulfillment of God’s promise.

And speaking of faith journeys, today just happens to be St. Patrick’s Day. That’s why we sang the opening hymn known as “St. Patrick’s Breastplate.” He too was called by God to go on a faith journey that resulted in the making of a great nation and spreading the good news of the gospel to the Irish people and to untold millions!

Patrick's journey of faith starts not with a call but with what appeared to be a horrible tragedy. When he was 16 years old Celtic pirates raided northeastern England and captured Patrick and many others then sailed with them to Ireland where they were sold into slavery. His captivity drove him to his knees and brought him to a devout faith in God. His heart was changed and he came to love his captors and learned much about the people and their Celtic culture.

One night after 6 years of captivity a voice spoke to him in a dream, saying, "*You are going home. Look! Your ship is ready!*" The voice directed him to flee for freedom the next morning. He slipped away just before daybreak, walked to the nearest seacoast, saw a ship moored there, and negotiated his passage to France (Gaul) where he is believed to have spent time working and learning more about the faith in the monastery of St. Martin of Tours before making his way back to his family in England. While there he trained for the priesthood and served as a parish priest for a number of years.

One night at the age of forty-eight he had another dream that would prove to be another call. An angel named Victor appeared and approached him with letters from his former captors back in Ireland. As he read the

letters in the dream, he heard their voices cry out in unison, “*we appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us.*” When he awoke, he believed this was God’s call for him to return to Ireland with the Christian gospel. He spoke with his bishop and was consecrated as history’s first missionary bishop, and commissioned and sent back to Ireland, these many years later.³

All that Patrick had been through had prepared him to lead this mission that would eventually bring the majority of an entire nation to faith in Christ. The journey of faith: First comes the Call, then we must face Obstacles/Doubt, before we can Trust and Take Action, and finally on to the Fulfillment of God’s plan and purpose.

So, my friends, I feel called as the Rector of St. Luke’s and to lead a group of Christ followers to love God with all of our hearts, minds, and strength, and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, to know Christ within ourselves and to make Christ known by first and foremost being Good News ourselves (it’s hard to share good news when we are bad news) and by sharing the Good News that God loves everyone, and to be

³ Hunter III, George, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2000) pp.13-34

the Episcopal Church in North Little Rock, a refuge for all who seek the love and acceptance of God, who

long to share in a loving community that not only passes the peace of Christ but practices the peace of Christ.

There may be obstacles, there may be doubts, but as we trust and take action – God will do for us what we

cannot do by ourselves alone, and will fulfill the purpose he has for us!

I close with these words from the Breastplate of St. Patrick:

Christ be with us, Christ within us,
Christ behind us, Christ in front of us,
Christ beside us, Christ to win us,
Christ to comfort and restore us.
Christ beneath us, Christ above us,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love us,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
Amen!