

Sermon: 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent

Text: Romans 4:1-8; 13-17 (v. 3)

Theme: Faith

Goal: We are saved by faith alone, as Abraham and all his true children were saved as well.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: *The toddler on the edge of the pool, who jumps into the arms of her father, trusts implicitly that her father will catch her.*

*Faith is relational: The father has caught her before and she has experienced his care and protection in many situations before she is on the side of the pool. This relationship is not of our construction, but God's construction. He is the Father; we are His children. He creates this relationship in our baptism, when we were adopted by Him as His beloved children, and He asks us just to trust in Him and to jump into His gracious arms. We are saved with Him. This is faith! Some don't trust and run away. Others try to enter by themselves in the pool; they risk their lives.* (Phil Brandt [PBrandt@cu-portland.edu](mailto:PBrandt@cu-portland.edu), 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent)

I – Abraham's faith

The Apostle Paul develops the issue of faith in this letter to the Romans because many were trying to enter the pool by themselves, i.e., were trying to justify themselves by obeying the Law, and not by trusting in God's promises in Christ. As Abraham was a well-known character of the Old Testament, Paul recalls the example of this Patriarch to show how salvation can be achieved: By faith alone, and not by own deeds.

Nothing is said about Abraham until God called Him. We don't know if he "was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time," or whether "he walked with God", like it is said about Noah (Genesis 6:9).

He entered into the history because he listened to God's call and believed in God's promise. If he hadn't believed, we would have never heard about Abraham. But his faith is remarkable and is a crucial point in the relationship between man and God.

Among all human beings, God, in His sovereignty, chose to call Abraham: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you...I will bless you" (Genesis 12:1,2). And several promises followed: 1) The promise to be a great nation; 2) the promise to receive a land; 3) and the promise to be a blessing to all the nations through his Offspring, the Messiah. The promises were against all human expectation. First of all, Abraham and his wife Sarah were old people and they didn't have a child. How can God promise to be a great nation, to receive a huge portion of land, and to have a special Offspring in the future if there is no descendant of Abraham? But in spite of the illogicality of God's promises, Abraham believed in God and obeyed Him. Abraham had *the confidence that God can do what He promises and that he will keep His Word* (ABC 1359). And we know from the Bible that every promise became true: Abraham and Sarah had a child, Isaac; his descendants received the Promised Land; and Jesus, the Messiah, was born from Abrahams' line, bringing the blessing of salvation to all peoples.

## II – Faith credited as righteousness

Paul raised a question to his opponents: Was Abraham justified and saved by deeds or by faith? The opponents had said that it was by deeds, because he obeyed God and because he was circumcised. Paul quoted the Scripture and said: "Abraham believed in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." This term is taken from the financial terminology. *Paul uses the word credited six times in 4:3-8. In a financial transaction, to credit someone with something is to put*

*it into his or her account. One's account can be credited with money obtained as wages or as a gift. However, if one has a job, one's wages are not a gift but something one is entitled to. Money credited to someone who has not worked for it is a gift. - Genesis states that Abraham was credited with righteousness because he believed in God. He did not do any work to earn this credit, and so was not entitled to be regarded as righteous. He was justified simple because he trusted God. – When God credits our faith as righteousness, He is not rewarding our good deeds but displaying His grace. Trying hard to be good does not impress God. All we need to do is to submit to Him by faith and allow Him to work in us and through us. (ABC 1358).*

### III- Faith in our lives

Abraham is called as “our father” (v. 16). He is the father not only of the Jewish people, their descendants according to his blood, but he is the father of all believers, which means the father of all who have the same faith he had. We are his spiritual descendants. And this accomplishes the promises that “all people on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3) and that God said, “I will make you a father of many nations” (v. 17).

This is only possible because of what Jesus did for us. He is the main Offspring of Abraham and the goal of all promises of the Old Testament. In His chat with Nicodemus (John 3), Jesus pointed to faith as the only way to escape from condemnation and to receive eternal life. The image of the Israelites in the wilderness looking to the bronze snake on a pole for healing as an act of faith illustrates what happens when we look to the crucified Jesus on the cross: we are healed from our sins and from eternal death, and we receive a new chance of life. This is faith. We cannot work for our forgiveness, we cannot command God to give us a wage because we did this and

that, but we can only believe in God's promise that through Christ we are forgiven and have life. The well-known text of John 3:16 was first said to Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."

We can trust without doubt in God's promises as Abraham trusted. And as Abraham was blessed during his life, so are we blessed in many ways. As Abraham is in the presence of God in heaven, we can be sure that we will be with him and with all departed believers in God's heavenly Kingdom as well. This faith gives strength, hope and directions to our lives.

Conclusion: This week we read a nice illustration about faith in our daily Portuguese devotional booklet. A father was explaining to his little son: *Faith is like a pair of glasses that God gives us when we are baptized, so that we can see things through God's eyes. Faith shows that the crucified Jesus is God Himself dying for our sins to give us forgiveness and salvation. Without this faith given by God, we cannot see Jesus as our Saviour. Without faith, Jesus is just one more character among several other heroes in the human history.*" (CF, 10 March 2014). This illustration helps us to understand why so many don't accept Jesus: They don't wear the glasses of faith offered by God in His Gospel and in the Sacraments. Their eyes cannot see the blessings God is pouring upon His people. We thank God that He gave us these glasses of faith and we ask to be strengthened daily in this faith. Lent Season is a special time to remember what Jesus did for us and how we are saved by His grace alone. *Faith trusts the promises which Christ makes. The more we know and understand the promises he makes, the better this faith becomes.* (Phil Brandt [PBrandt@cu-](mailto:PBrandt@cu-portland.edu)

[portland.edu](mailto:PBrandt@cu-portland.edu), 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent) Amen.

(Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 16 March 2014)