

Sermon Draft

Text: Hebrews 11:1-16; Genesis 15:1–6

Sermon: “Do Not Be Afraid”

Faith is the key word to describe the theme for this Sunday. In the OT Lesson, Abraham believes God’s promise that he would have a son and heir. In the Epistle, the nature of abiding faith is defined as being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we cannot see. In the Gospel, Jesus begins with the same words given to Abram, “Do not be afraid.” The gift of faith enables us to receive the kingdom of God and to watch for the Lord’s return.

God says, “Do not be afraid!” We have heard these words before: “Believe. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. He will provide for you.” But a reality check reminds us that we do not yet see all that God has promised, and we may think we have good reason to fear.

Two small boys walked into a dentist’s office. One of them said bravely, “I want a tooth taken out, and I don’t want any anesthetic, because we’re in a hurry!”

The dentist replied, “You’re brave—which tooth is it?” The boy turned to his smaller friend and said, “Show him your tooth, Tommy!”

When someone tells us not to be afraid, we may feel like Tommy. In every stage of life, we must face the nemesis of fear. In childhood, it is the dark. We adults may fear for our children or worry about retirement. Finally, death itself causes fear. Can anyone shore up our faith? Yes! The God of Abraham, the great I AM, comes to us today in his Word and says, “***Do not be afraid.***”

God establishes a relationship that enables us to face our fears. God established a covenant with Abram. God renewed the covenant throughout Abram’s life. When Abram had doubts, the Lord assured him, “***Don’t be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward***” (15:1). The all-sufficient and all-powerful I AM, who called Abram to leave his country and travel to the Promised Land, also promised to provide for him and protect him.

Abram believed the Lord. This was the third time God had given to Abram his promise of numerous descendants. Abram was convinced that he could count on the Lord. As a further assurance, God changed his name to Abraham. The great I AM, who gave to Abraham the promised son in Isaac, is the same God who promises to take away our fears and provide for us.

God establishes a covenant with us. God established a relationship with Abram. God adopts us into his family in Baptism, gives us faith through which we, like Abraham, are deemed righteous (Genesis 15:6), and establishes peace forever in our hearts. God forgives our sins and grants us everlasting life with him. We can count on him to sustain us.

God's action moves us to trust him completely. Since God made good on his promise to save us in Christ, we trust him to provide for us. He moves us from fear to faith. The Lord does this because he is the great I AM, the all-sufficient God of the universe, who is our shield and very great reward. God gives to us a faith to face our fears.

Because God has established a relationship with us through his only Son, Jesus Christ, we now have a faith which is “*sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*” A faith that sees the invisible.

Faith does not have to see it to believe it. None of us were around to observe God create the world by his spoken (invisible) word (Hebrews 11:3). Nor did any of us see God’s incarnate Word be born, suffer and die on the cross, then rise again. Jesus said to Thomas, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (John 21:29). As God strengthens our faith through his Word and Sacraments, we learn to trust him, even though we often can’t see the fulfillment of his promises. A faith that believes the incredible.

God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation and that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, way beyond her child-bearing years. Abraham’s reaction was something like, “Why, Lord, that’s incredible!”

God's promise was contrary to human reason and experience, yet he caused it to come true.

God calls us to trust him for our future and to believe his promises, even though they may seem incredible. It indeed seems incredible that God would love us, knowing the way we are. It seems incredible that God would give up his only Son for you and me, that we might be forgiven and live forever with him. It may seem incredible that no matter how bad things are, the Lord is our shield and our very great reward.

Sometimes we are like the grandpa who took his first airplane ride at the age of 86. The private plane circled for about 20 minutes, then landed. The children asked him, "Well, Grandpa, how did you like it?" "Fine," he replied, "but I never did put my full weight down on the blasted thing!"

As God's people, our full weight and trust is in the Lord our God. In spite of our fears and apprehensions, he fills us with His mercy and gives us faith to believe even the incredible. A faith that receives the impossible.

It seemed impossible that Abraham could have a son and be the father of a great nation. It can seem just as impossible that even though we sin much daily, God forgives us in Christ and uses us to extend his kingdom. Do you see “impossible” hurdles before you? Do you have “impossible” problems? Do you have fears that just won’t go away? God grants us faith to trust him in every circumstance. God’s mercy in Christ enables us to receive his assurance and courage, even in those situations which seem impossible.

A great man of faith was asked, “If God promised in his Word to walk with you through a brick wall, would you try it?” “Yes,” the man answered. “I would walk by faith, and God would make a hole.” Sometimes the future looks like a brick wall. It did to Abraham and Sarah. Yet the God who cares for us is the great I AM. He assures us, “I am your shield and very great reward.” Through him we have a faith that sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible.

“I am your shield” is the answer Yahweh gives to assure Abraham of his promises and chase away his fears. A shield is used mainly for defense, to ward off incoming arrows or spears.

The Lord can be trusted to protect us from Satan’s fiery darts. We are not left to fend for ourselves in this dark and sinful world. This promise to Abram was particularly appropriate in that it came “after” (v 1) the battle between the kings in chapter 14, when Lot was taken captive.

Abram was asked to believe that having the Lord as his shield was much better than relying on the king of Sodom and the other kings in the region. *“I am your shield”* reminds us that God is our great I AM, all-sufficient for all our needs. Most of all, he forgives our sins and gives us salvation through his Son. So, we do not need to be afraid.

Amen