

The Light of Faith     Genesis 22 and Hebrews 11: 8-19

Abraham and Sarah are our faith parents. They set the tone,  
and the character, and the spirit - of life with God.

As we all know, and  
as we see in the life of Abraham and Sarah,  
life is not easy.  
We all have our struggles, our doubts,  
our unfulfilled dreams, our times of testing, and  
our burdens to bear.

And life with God is no different,  
sometimes it is even more intense – this struggle.  
Some people suggest that when God comes into your life  
and you give your life over to God  
all your problems will be over.

As a matter of fact some preachers even promise that  
when you give your life over to God you will  
experience prosperity and health and  
true emotional well being and success.

It is true,  
there are three features that above all characterize our  
life with God, but they are not health, wealth and success.  
They are faith, hope, and love.  
Those are the three main features of a life with God.  
Faith, hope, and love  
are the three features that define a Christian life.

During these next three weeks of Advent,  
of preparation, of deepening our life in Christ,  
we will focus on these three features.  
Today we look at the Light of Faith in our lives.  
The bible in Romans 1:17 says  
Christians (the righteous) will live by faith alone.  
Not by their own efforts, nor money they've made,  
nor smarts they've developed, but by faith.  
What does that mean? To live by faith alone?  
Do you want to live by faith?

Abraham and Sarah, our faith parents,  
didn't have an easy time of it, living with God.  
Living with God and doing the things God asked them  
to do was an agonizing journey highlighted in this  
heroes of the faith Chapter 11 of Hebrews.

Look with me at V8.

Abraham and Sarah are living a comfortable life  
among family and friends in their country of origin.

They are wonderfully retired,  
and at the age 80 God comes into their lives and  
says to them: “pick up your lives, lock stock and  
barrel, and move to an undefined far away  
threatening place.”

Can you image the conversations between Abraham and Sarah as they came to realize  
what God wanted them to do?

Can you imagine the arguments they had with relatives  
and friends about this insane idea that popped into  
their heads?

Yet by faith they went.

By faith they allowed their whole lives to change.

Now look at V9.

When Abraham and Sarah came to the Promised Land  
after a long dangerous journey.

Did they have it made? Had they arrived?

No. They were strangers in a foreign land.

They looked different. They spoke different.

They thought different.

I remember when Adriana and I were in Uganda we were  
the only white people in the village.

They called us mazzungus.

Children pointed their fingers at us.

We felt so different.

We didn't know their customs and felt  
awkward and confused.

And we had no taste for their food.

Do you think

it is easy living as a stranger in a foreign land?

Some of us experience that felling living in S California.

Yet by faith Abraham and Sarah did. They welcomed it.

Now look at V11. Do you think being childless was easy?

It was the worst pain they could bear.

It was a shame to be barren, and  
most often childless couples feel cheated.

Most couples looked forward to the joy of children.

Children in that society were their social security;  
they were their ticket to a place in the Promised Land - a  
future.

With their whole being

Abraham and Sarah had longed for a child.  
Prayed for a child, cried for a child.  
And finally after having put that broken dream on the  
shelf for 30-40 some odd years,  
when Abraham was a 100 years old and Sarah 90.  
Long past the time of child bearing.  
God comes to these good as dead people and says:  
you are going to have a child.  
Would you believe it?  
Would you get your hopes up again?  
Would you start all over again with a family?  
Yet by faith they did.  
Long before Viagra,  
by faith their bodies awakened and  
they became proud parents of a son  
whom they called Laughter – Joy – Isaac.

And then look at Verse 17.

This is the greatest test of all in terms of living by faith.  
One day God asked Abraham and Sarah to sacrifice  
this Joy of their old age,  
this son that brought a smile to their face,  
this son who gave them the social and eternal  
security they longed for.  
God came and asked them to sacrifice him.  
To kill him,  
to destroy everything they hoped for and longed for.  
Genesis 22 is one of the most difficult chapters in the bible.  
What kind of God would ask a thing like that?  
Or do a thing like that?  
What kind of man or woman would sacrifice their one  
and only son? Their own flesh and blood?  
What awful thoughts and struggles Abraham and Sarah  
must have endured during those three days traveling to  
the mountain.  
And what an agonizing climb up to the top with his  
10 year old son asking all those questions.  
Yet by faith  
Abraham raised his knife to slay the son he loved.  
God and communion with God  
was his number one priority.  
God was the only one he revered and worshipped.

If we look at these highlights in the faith-life of Abraham  
and Sarah, people who lived by faith alone  
we can conclude that:

Faith is

obeying God even though what God asks sometimes  
does not make sense, and  
does not seem to make us more comfortable,  
or more happy – often the opposite.

Faith is

being OK with feeling confused and strange and ill  
adjusted, and living in tents  
always ready to adapt and change and move on.  
Its not-feeling-at-home in the here and now  
but always longing, always looking for something  
more glorious beyond the horizon that is of God.

Faith is

letting God have his way with us emotionally and  
physically so he can use us for his purpose.

Faith is

going against every ounce of parental and human and  
economic wisdom and  
willingly sacrificing our most prized possession,  
our most precious relationship,  
our most precious beliefs and hopes  
to honor God and his mission.

Faith, faith is the foundation of advent.

Faith is the light by which we live our journey with God.  
It's always looking forward to something  
God is building and doing.

Verses 13 -16 are probably the best definition of the life of adventure God is calling us to.  
That life of faith in him.

People of faith (v13) know that

what they have and experience in the here and now is  
not all that God wants for them. There is more.  
A lot more. And people of faith desire it.

People of faith (v13) see a reality in the future and

with all their heart welcome it,  
and look forward to it, and work for it.

People of faith (v13) consider themselves

strangers and aliens,

they see themselves as only traveling through to a  
home with God. To a future with God.

People of faith (v15)

do not look yearningly at the past,  
at what they have, or used to have, but instead  
long for a better country – a heavenly city,  
the new Jerusalem.

People of faith,

in their desire for God and his coming in their lives  
actually begin to look like God themselves,  
and to do what God would do.

Abraham in that final test was

willing to sacrifice his one and only son.

This is what God himself was willing to do and did  
when he sent Jesus to earth.

Jesus did what Abraham was willing to do.

He sacrifice his life for God's future.

God sacrificed his one and only son so that we could  
have eternal life with him.

Do you want to be a person of faith?

Do you want that light of faith to guide you?

The author of Hebrews in chapter 12

as a conclusion to this chapter of living by faith  
says v 1,

Therefore, let us throw off everything

that hinders our relationship and our desires for God.

Do everything possible to deal with the sin that  
entangles you to the life here and now.

Instead let us run with perseverance,  
the race marked out ahead of us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,

who is going before us,

the author and perfecter of our faith.

Jesus was the ultimate person of faith.

He saw the joy of the Lord,

he longed for that joy and that peace

of living in deep communion with God, his father.

And he endured the cross, and shame, and oddness,

and alienation, and conflicts, and doubts, and loneliness

because he saw that city of God in the future,

that life of joy with God.

He lived by faith alone.

Look to Jesus, Hebrews 12:3 says.

Consider this baby born in a manger,  
welcome him into your life,  
make room for him in your thoughts and  
your hopes and dreams, and your ambitions  
consider this man of faith;  
and you too will not grow weary and lose heart, and  
get bogged down in the trials and struggles, and  
doubts of your life.  
Jesus is the light of faith.  
He is the torch, the  
flash light we can carry through our darkness.

One day when Jesus was on earth  
he met a man who was deeply burdened about his child  
the child he loved.  
This child was sick, possessed by the spirits of his age.  
His future was doomed.  
This man came to Jesus and said: Mark 9:22  
“If you can do anything, Jesus,  
take pity on us and help us.”

“If I can?” “IF I CAN?” said Jesus.  
“Everything is possible for those who believe,  
for those who have faith.”

Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed,  
“I do believe, please help me overcome my unbelief.”

Then Jesus healed them both, the son and the father.  
A little while later the disciples asked.  
“Why couldn’t we help them?  
Why couldn’t we drive out his unbelief.?”

And Jesus said, “This can only be done through prayer.”

Advent,  
and the stories of faith in advent are a invitation  
for us to pray for faith. A faith to live by.  
A faith to put into action.  
Today as we light the candle of faith, we are invited  
to look to Jesus as the light of our faith.  
To look to Jesus as our help,  
to pray to him to help us live by faith alone.  
Let us pray.

Holy Spirit, Jesus, Father, you who did not spare your only son, your own flesh and blood for us. We believe, we believe, but Oh God help us overcome our unbelief. Help us Holy Spirit to live by faith alone. Amen?