



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

April 24, 2022

Pastor James Enderle

2nd Sunday of Easter

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Genesis 15:1-6](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 16

Second Lesson: [2 Peter 1:16-21](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 20:19-31](#)

Living by Faith

1. God works the impossible
2. Human faith is not absent of doubt
3. Faith depends on what is outside of us
4. Righteousness by faith in the Lord

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

I'm going to start out with something that on its own you might say "How can you say that, especially as a Lutheran?" By the end you won't be calling me a heretic, but I'm going to say that just faith, only faith doesn't save anyone. How can we say that when, as Lutherans, we always say "We're saved by faith alone"? We can have faith in a lot of different things. We are told to believe in all sorts of things. I think the easiest thing to go to is one of the great prophets and storytellers of our day. For many kids and many generations, it's Disney.

What has all the Disney movies told you to do? It's to believe in yourself; to have faith that you can do it. It's what almost every kids' movie boils down to; faith. There are a lot of different types of faith and belief in the world, so you have to say does just faith, does just believing in something save you? That's what we're talking about; **living by faith** and those who are Christian, we live by faith. But what does that mean and how do we live by faith, and what do we really need to focus on when we talk about **living by faith**?

For our focus today, we are looking at the life of Abram. I'm going to interchange his name a little bit with Abraham because most of the time we call him Abraham. He'll be renamed not too long after the section of our text today, to be Abraham. But as we

look at him, we'll see a little bit of what his life was like and how he trusted in God, how he had faith, but also maybe a few of his struggles as well.

As we find Abram at this time, we see that God had called him from his homeland. We all know what God had done with Abram. He said "Leave everything. Leave your family. Leave your friends. Leave your nation. Go to this new place and I'm going to make you the father of a great nation. You're going to have many offspring." How old was Abram at that time already? It sounds like he was already an older man. Sarai at that time (she'll be named Sarah later) was barren. She couldn't have any children. So God picks Abram and Sarai and says "You leave this area and you go to this new land. I'm going to start this new nation, my people, here."

If you were going to start your plan and establish a nation/country and have many offspring, is that who you would pick? Would you pick an old man and a woman who couldn't have children? It seems kind of foolish. Why not just pick someone who is there and has all the friends and people set up and all the connections already? Why send them off to this other land?

I think we see this happen and we think God chooses Abram and Sarai because God is trying to show that it's not dependent on us but that **God works the impossible**. There are so many things that we think are all about us, but finally we have to see that it's really about God and what He does. This is really the whole story of the Bible and our history. **God works the impossible**. That's how the whole Bible starts. God creates something out of nothing. He created EVERYTHING out of nothing.

So He takes Abram and Sarai and it's the exact same thing. He is going to create something out of nothing, out of things that (by our human reason) wouldn't seem possible. He does this over and over again in the Bible by showing when things seem impossible, when we clearly see that man couldn't accomplish it, we see God working. We see that of course it couldn't be us but it's God working the impossible.

God comes and He gives these promises. But like things often go when God gives promises, there are sometimes challenges. There are things that happen that cause people to wonder, *hey, is God going to follow through? Is this really going to happen?* You maybe think about that in your life about some promises or things that happen in your life and say "God, you promised this, but it doesn't look like this is going to happen. How are you going to keep this promise?"

For Abram and Sarai, they were sent to this new land, to Cana, and then a famine happens. They go to Egypt. When they are there, Abram does something kind of surprising. Do you remember what he does? He tells Pharaoh that Sarah is not his wife. Why does he say this? Even though he knows this promise from God that God is going to give him a child through him and Sarah, he pretty much gives up his wife because he

is afraid for HIS life. He is afraid that *if they find out that she is my wife, they will kill me and take her anyway*. So he shows a lack of faith and the doubt in trusting God. We'll see that he does this not just once, but he does this again later.

God rescues them and brings them back. Then we come to this point in our text. ***After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."*** He is giving Abram this promise. ***But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."*** Our focus today is on faith and how faith is important. How would you describe Abram's faith right here? Not too strong, right? It's important to remember that with human faith, there is always some doubt that is connected with that. **Human faith is not absent of doubt.** Abram is a really good example of this. Here he is and he has gone through this difficulty and then they are back home and he is thinking, *God hasn't given me an heir. We should probably do what we need to do to have an heir. I'll count him as my child and then I will have this great nation.* It's easy for us to doubt God's promises at times.

But God gives him this promise. ***Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."*** God had promised them in the beginning, ***"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.*** You can trust me. I'm your reward. I will give you everything you need" and Abram wasn't sure about that. So God reassures him. He promises them that this is true and this is going to happen.

How did that go after God promised him again, "You will have an heir of your own flesh and blood"? They heard that. Sarah said "Okay, we still don't have a kid and I'm getting old. Let's try something else. Here is my maidservant, Hagar. Why don't we have an heir with her?" And they did. That is Ishmael. We know all of the things that came from that; all the difficulties between Sarah and Isaac. It was not the best decision, right?

There are times where God promises us things that we know we can trust in, but aren't we impatient? We say "God, you promised this but I'm not too satisfied with your timeframe. Maybe I'll take things into my own hands. I know you say that this is the right thing to do, the right way to do it, but if I do it this way, maybe it will get done a little bit faster or it will be a little bit easier even though I know it's not exactly in line with your Word." That's something that we can often do. We fall into this doubt and wonder if things can really be true as God says. Thomas was a great example of this. "How could this be true?" God came and reassured him.

As God shows Abram the stars in the sky and He promises them the heir, we see these important words after. ***Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*** This belief and this righteousness come from God. This is a promise and this is something that we fail so often. We need to know that faith doesn't rely just on me and what I do and what I think. We need to be reminded that **faith depends on what is outside of us.** What do I mean by that? Sometimes we can say "You just have to have strong enough faith or just believe harder." That's kind of coming from inside you.

We talked about different things that you could believe or that just believing doesn't save you. What do I mean by this? When we were in China, we had the opportunity to teach some about Christianity in a college philosophy class. We would teach a little bit about faith and the differences between just believing and believing in other religions and talking about faith. One of the examples we would use is that you can get people excited and you can have a strong faith in just about anything. You could be passionate about anything but what you believe in really matters, and if it's true or not makes a big difference.

I could get up here and I could tell you all there is a chair behind me. There is a chair and we can all get excited and I can believe really strongly that there is a chair. (There is actually a chair sitting off to the side and in front of Pastor Enderle.) I'm not going to do it, but if I sit down, what would happen? I would fall down and probably hurt something. But then (he moves the chair back and stands in front of it) if I'm over here and say "I believe there is a chair. I think there is a chair" and my faith is not super strong but I believe and I sit down, what matters? It's that the chair is real and it's really there. So it's not just about my faith (your faith needs to be there) but it's what you believe in. Our **faith depends** not just on ourselves but **on what is outside of us.**

Why is this important? It says here that ***Abram believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*** We know that **righteousness** comes **by faith in the Lord.** We're not saved by how strong our faith is or how good my works are or how much I've done or anything based on me. This all comes by grace. It's all a gift. If it's not, then I'm always wondering *have I done enough? Is my faith strong enough?* When those doubts creep in, then I might say, "Oh, I have a doubt! Then it must not be right. Is this really true?" We want to answer doubt. We want people to bring doubts and ask questions because, what does Jesus do? Jesus, when people have doubts, comes and shows them and tells them "This is who I am." We don't want to be afraid of doubts and questions because we know the resurrection is true. We are saved by Jesus, who died for you, who rose for you, who has made you righteous and redeemed. It's not about us. It's about Him and His love and what He has done for you.

So why do we use Abram as our example? He believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. He is the father of all believers. Those offspring are not just offspring by

blood. Yes, he had a son, Isaac, but he doubted often. Even the name Isaac comes because Sarah laughed when the angel said "You are going to have a son." Their life was filled with doubt but often still with acts of faith because of God. If you read the [Book of Genesis](#) and read about Abram, often it's like you're reading about two different people.

Do you ever feel that way in your life? Do you ever do, like Abram did with Sarah, the same thing, not once but twice? Or maybe several times? Maybe more times in a day? He's an example of us. He's an example of how we fall short and we doubt and we have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and we don't deserve anything. But we're declared righteous. We are given the righteousness of God because God loves us and He sent His Son to die for us; to be our Savior, to be our Redeemer, and to give us faith because **God works the impossible.**

He takes us and works something out of nothing. He creates faith in our cold and hard heart; faith that wants to serve Him and wants to love and wants to tell others about this great message. About the truth that Jesus has died and risen and that He comes and says "Peace." Peace to you and to me today. What we need so much, not today, not every day, but forever. We need to hear this message of peace and to be reminded that we have righteousness. We have been forgiven and it's not just for one day. It's for eternity.

So as the Lord comes to you in His Word and in His Sacrament, we live by faith, not just by faith in anything, but faith in a risen Lord. And faith in a risen Lord means you too will rise again and be with Him forever. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7.\)](#) Amen.