

*The Second Sunday in Lent*  
March 20, 2011  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Genesis 12

*The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. (NIV)*

Promises, promises. We make some promises that are tougher to keep than others, don't we? Did you know that Abe Lincoln once agreed to marry a girl he had not seen in over three years? I'm not sure how to say this without sounding mean so I will just read what I found. After these three years she is described as a "larger Kentuckian woman, ugly, and toothless." Nevertheless, Abe was a man of integrity and was willing to keep his promise and propose to her. Ironically, she rejected him. Certain promises are hard to keep and those who keep them like this are few and far between.

Promises, promises. Even when we have good intentions of keeping promises, we can't keep them all, can we? A couple weeks ago, my children had a Thursday and Friday break from school and Andrew wanted me to take him golfing. I told Andrew that Thursday I had a busy day, but I promised Andrew that after I come home from church Friday morning I would take him golfing in the afternoon for sure. But when Friday came it rained and rained and rained all day. My promise to my son was broken. Some promises are not just tough, but impossible for us to keep.

So how are God's promises any different? Promises, promises. Why should we consider these promises more than any other promises? Today, as the Lord makes promises to Abram, we are reminded once again why, when it comes to our God, we are able to confidently: **Live on His Promises.**

How can we not be a bit skeptical when it comes to promises today? We are absolutely bombarded with them. Again and again, the can't lose money schemes and sure fire diet plans are thrown in our faces. The endless guarantees and warranties for almost every product under the sun are constantly under our noses. So many of them fail and disappoint us. We also realize there are times we break our own promises to people. We don't always follow through on what we say we will do. We hurt others with our broken promises, and others hurt us by their broken promises. The bigger the promise

broken, the bigger the hurt. It hurts when someone is not faithful to us, when someone says one thing and does another, when people do not keep their word. Promises, promises. If we had to live only on the promises of what people tell us or what we tell others, life would be extremely sad and very uncertain at times.

So now put ourselves into the shoes of Abram. What if he lumped these promises of God into all the other kinds of promises that are made? What if he decided he better take the Lord's promises with a grain of salt? What if we would do the same? Then, my friends, we would miss out on a whole lot. The Lord's promises are different because they are the only promises that are truly 100% guaranteed. There is never a promise God does not keep. There is never a promise the almighty God cannot keep. There is never a promise the Lord will not keep. With this in mind we look at promises, promises. ***"The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."***

The Lord tells Abram to leave everything - his land, family, and all he knows. The Lord tells Abram to go to a place he does not know - a place that God will show him. But God does not make Abram go empty handed. The Lord gives promises - remarkable, amazing, impossible promises - promises to live on. This 75 year old man with a 65 year old barren wife will become a great nation. The Lord will bless Abram and make his name great so that those who bless him will be blessed and those who curse him will be cursed. He will be a blessing to others, in fact, all the people on the earth, all nations, will be blessed through Abram. All this sounds a little too good to be true - even coming from God! But what choice did Abram have in this matter. He didn't ask the Lord for all these things. He wasn't trying to make his name great like the people did in the previous chapter at the tower of Babel. God came to Abram in His grace. God made these promises. The Lord makes this covenant with him.

The Lord will keep this covenant. Abram did well to trust these promises because not a single promise failed. Abraham at 100 years of age and Sarah at 90 had the son God promised through whom the Lord would make Abram's family into a great nation. He used Abraham to bless others as when he rescued Lot and his family. He made Abraham's name great - there is a reason we still know it today. For you and me who know the history of Israel these had to be some tough promises to keep. Israel, and we too, commit sins that make us more than ugly and toothless. Yet, God remains faithful to them - to us.

God kept the most important promise to bless all peoples, all nations, through Abram. The Lord did the impossible through one on Abraham's descendants. Remember when the angel Gabriel told a young maiden named Mary that she would have a Son who would sit on Jacob's throne and have a kingdom that will not end. ***"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God....For nothing is impossible with God."*** (Luke 1)

The Lord keeps promises for us that seem not just unlikely, but impossible. Like the one we see the Lord keep for Abram and for us in Lent. In Lent we see just how the Lord provides blessings for all nations - through Christ. Jesus suffers and dies to take away the sins of the world. Talk about a tough promise to keep! Yet, the Lord kept it for us when He forsook His own Son on the cross. The Lord kept it for us when He punished Jesus for all our lies and broken promises. The Lord kept it for us by crediting us with Jesus' perfect faithfulness. The best and most reliable guarantee of all, that we can trust all God's promises, was given to us when Jesus came out of the grave alive on Easter Day.

Now these are promise to live on! And Abram certainly did. The Lord continued to bless Abram and gave him more promises such as a great land for his descendents. Abraham always had God's promises to fall back on - to live on. So Abram lived trusting these promises and praising the Lord for His grace. The Lord remained faithful to Abram, even when Abram was unfaithful such as we read about in the very next chapter. You see what makes Abraham a model for us all is not a righteousness he had in and by himself. He was righteous by faith. He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. He simply trusted the Lord's promises.

Why shouldn't we? We, as Abraham's spiritual children, continue to receive awesome, remarkable, impossible promises - promises to live on. Think of what takes place every time we have a baptism, every time another person hears the gospel and comes to faith in Christ Jesus, every time we approach this altar to take the Lord's Supper. Promises, promises. I pray we never lump the Lord's promises in with all the other promises we hear or make. The Lord's promises are different. His Word is always truth.

This morning I simply encourage this - study His Word and get to know the promises the Lord makes to you. There are many. They are remarkable. For the Lord knows the plans He has for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29) When what we see with our eyes is telling us different, turn back to God's promises - look again to the cross and see how the Lord has kept for you His toughest and most impossible promise. Live by faith in the Lord's promises for He will be faithful to every one of them. Trust in the Lord and you will never be hurt or put to shame. Finally, we have promises to live on - His promises, promises. Amen.

