

The Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost
August 11, 2013
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Genesis 15:1-6

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." But Abram said, "O 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." Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Has anyone ever made you a big promise? Your parents promise that if you get all A's at school this year they will take you to Disney World. Your high school sweetheart vows to love you and you alone forever. Your boss keeps holding before your eyes the promise of the promotion you have always wanted. The financial advisor promises that if you stick to this plan you will have security throughout your retirement. Perhaps you have had similar or even bigger promises made to you. How confident are you in such promises? What kind of faith do you have in them? Are you willing to believe even some things that sound too good to be true?

Wouldn't you agree that when it comes to big promises so much of it depends on the one making the promise? Can I trust this person? Has he or she been faithful to their word in the past? Have they promised me the world before only to break my heart? Do they have the power to actually do for me what they say they will? I think you probably understand where I am going with this as today we focus on a big promise from God. For no one has made bigger promises to us than God! No one is able to keep all their promises to us like God! So my prayer this morning is that we, like Abraham, believe as we listen to a very: **Big promise from an even Bigger God!**

God certainly made big promise after big promise to Abraham. We also have much evidence that Abram trusted these promises. Two chapters earlier Abram showed his faith that God would carry out the promise to give him a great land by generously letting his nephew Lot take first pick. In chapter 14, Abraham again displayed faith in God's promises to bless him and make him great by not keeping the plunder from the victory he had against the alliance of four kings. Yet, I think we sometimes have a tendency to build up in our minds someone like Abraham, who here is still Abram, as such a strong, unshakable person. We may even look at Abram as having some kind of super-human faith. After all, look at everything that we read about him as a hero of faith in Hebrews chapter 11.

But the Lord sees the heart and what God understood as He looked into the heart was that Abram too had his doubts. There was one big promise Abram still had on his mind. There is something over which Abram is starting to waver. There is something that he fears. So God comes to Abram. He comes to Abram with His Word. *"The word of the Lord came to Abram."* The word comes to him in a special way, *"in a vision."*

In this vision the Lord says, ***“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”*** The Lord comes with His Word to comfort and reassure Abram. Abram has no reason to fear for the Lord is His strength and His greatest prize. The Lord was on His side so no one could stand against Abram. In these words the Lord is also inviting Abram to speak the concerns of his heart.

Now we get to listen to what was troubling this great man of faith. ***“O 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.”*** Literally, Abram says that he is perishing stripped of children. It was ten years ago already that God made that big promise to Abram that he would have a son. Abram was 75 years old then when God made that big promise that Abram would have many descendents. Now Abram was 85 years old and was still waiting for an heir so God could fulfill his biggest promise – giving him a child through which the Savior would come and all nations will be blessed. But at this point this promise seemed to be too big and Abram started to doubt that it will ever happen.

What big promises of God have made you feel the same way? Have you ever wondered if God really hears and answers all your prayers? Have you ever questioned how God was going to work out certain troubles and trials for your own good? Have you ever had any doubts that Jesus has taken all your sins away, that all your sin is forgiven, and that heaven is your home? What promises of God seem to be too big right now in your lives? We fear and falter and fail just like Abram does here, don't we?

Then, like Abram, we need the Lord to speak to us in His Word. ***“Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.”*** The Lord repeats His promise to Abram. The Lord will give him a son. Not his servant but his own flesh and blood will be his heir. Then God takes Abram outside and tells him to look up at the stars and count if he could indeed count them. ***“Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”*** The Lord reminds Abram that this big promise was not too big for God. Abram had an even bigger God. The God who set each one of those stars in place could certainly keep the promise to give Abram a son, at whatever age God should choose (which will be when Abraham is 100).

Perhaps you've heard the illustration about a little boy walking with his father one wintry day on an icy sidewalk. The little boy slipped and fell and then raising to his feet said, ***“Daddy, I think I better hold on to your hand.”*** They came to another slippery spot and the little boy's feet went out from under him. He lost his grip on his father's hand and fell again. Getting up once more, this time he said, ***“Daddy, I think you better hold my hand so I'll be safe.”*** Dear friends, this is very much what the Lord does for Abram. The Lord holds him up with His promises. This is not all about how great a man Abram is here! It is about a big promise from and even bigger God who keeps His promises!

All Abram does is say ***“okay God. Lord, it is good to know You got me and will keep me safe and do for me what You have said.”*** This is what it means that Abram believed the Lord. The Hebrew word for believe is the word from which we get our English ***“Amen.”*** That's all Abram did. He said ***“Amen”*** to God's promise. He said okay God. And as Abram was brought to trust in this big promise we have this remarkable truth. ***“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”*** Abram is made right with God not because he was such a good person, not even because his faith

was so strong, but because of the big promise of an even bigger God. God credited to Abram a righteousness that was not His own.

There is a reason why this verse is quoted in several places in the New Testament when referring to how we too are saved. For we too know of a righteousness that has nothing to do with us, a righteousness apart from the law to which all the law and the prophets testify. This is the righteousness of Jesus, the descendent promised to Abraham, which is credited to us. We see God's biggest promise to us in Jesus. We see God's biggest promise to us on the cross where Jesus' blood was shed and in the tomb that Jesus left behind. God's promise to us is that Jesus suffered and died to pay for all our sins. God's promise to us is that because our Jesus lives we too will live forever. And all we do is say, like Abram, "*okay God.*" That is all faith is – saying Amen to God's promises. And like the Lord did for Abram so He credits it to us as righteousness.

Now that is a big promise! If we start to think it to be too big perhaps we could also go out outside on some clear night and look up at the stars and try to count them if we could indeed count them. But even better, I suggest we open His Word and listen again to His promises. Yes, in His Word we see some very big promises but we also see an even bigger God – one who loves you so much that He gave you His Son. Amen.