

WHAT DOES JESUS BELIEVE ABOUT ME?

2. How Will You Respond?

Genesis 12: 1-4

I was taken back last week with John Claypool's reverse question: Not, "What do I believe about Jesus," but, "What does Jesus believe about me?"

We easily can declare what we believe about Jesus: Son of God, Savior of the world; truly human and truly divine; died on the cross; great teacher; was resurrected on the third day; ascended into heaven; sits at the right hand of God. Almost could quote the Apostles' Creed and we would have a good summary of what we believe about Jesus.

Yet, it becomes a bit unnerving when we turn the question around to "What does Jesus believe about me, about us?" While we will never know what Jesus really believes about us, it is a good question to raise about ourselves. Especially during a time of self-reflection, personal examination, looking deeply with ourselves.

It provides us with a standard to use in the Season of Lent. It forces us to take stock of who we are and more importantly **WHOSE** we are! Where is our loyalty? Where is our allegiance? Where is our faith?

So, I decided this will be the theme of our series for Lent this year: what does Jesus believe about me? And each week I'll explore an aspect that question. Join me in the exploration. I've not read ahead in the lectionary to see if the passages will work. So, join me in this journey as we explore, "What does Jesus believe about me?"

The Old Testament and New Testament passages for today from the Lectionary provide us with two stories that fit the series. Because of the time I spent on the Genesis passage about Abram, I am holding the New Testament

passage about Nicodemus until next week!

So, let's see what Abram might teach us about this question.

Genesis 12 has always been a major story in the Old Testament. It is a story about the call of Abram whose name you know changes to Abraham. The highlights of the story are downright scary:

1. God spoke to Abram
2. Go from your country.
3. Go from your kindred
4. Go from your father's house.
5. Go to a land I will show you.

Remember, Abram was a 75 years old. An age that is very familiar to practically all of us here. Do you hear how radical the call of God is? Leave Petersburg. Leave the USA. Leave all your relatives. Leave your heritage, your history, everything that makes you who you are!

Let that sink in for a bit. Let that upset you. Leave your children. Leave your grandchildren. Leave your great grandchildren. Pull up roots and get ready to travel to someplace that God only knows.

It's hard enough for us to downsize and figure out what stuff to get rid of. It's

hard enough to leave your home. It's hard enough to move to a retirement community which you know some about and even some people who live there!

And yet, we are called, about our ages, to be willing to go somewhere we have not clue about. We are asked to go be with people we never have met. We are asked to trust we will have some place to lay our heads when we get there.

And all of these imperatives are because of a promise God is making. I realize God's promises are ones you can count on. Yet, how many of us will leave all we have and know for a promise?

And the promise to Abram was God would make him a great nation. God would bless him. God would multiply through his descendants all of the families of the earth. He would be famous. He would be known world-wide. And the world would be different because of Abram and because Abram had obeyed God.

Yet the ironic part of the story is not transparent or clear. Sarah, his wife, was barren! So, how in the name of goodness could he bless all of the families of the earth through his family tree? How could he and Sarah multiply and have numerous children? She can't even get pregnant.

Is this some kind of sick joke? Is this some kind of April Fool's joke on Abram? Is Abram going to tell everyone this promise and possibly make a fool of himself as he leaves town?

The question before us is how would you respond? And let's make it less world-wide in significance. You are not going to bless all the nations of the world. It is not so cosmic in nature. But the question before us is that when God calls us to a particular task, how will we respond? And in the middle of that question is our question of the day, "What would Jesus believe about us in our response?" How would Jesus see us in

our response to God's promise? What kind of 'witness' would we be making about believing the promises of God?

Seems like there are several points here in this story.

FIRST, you and I are never too old to respond to the promises of God or the calling of God. I have heard it over and over again from good church folks: I served my time on the Session. I taught Sunday School. I was on the Board of Deacons. I was a youth advisor. I was the Clerk of Session for year. I was the chair of Stewardship numerous times. I had to balance the finances of the church as the

Treasurer and there was just no balancing to be done!

Many of us in our mature years declare we have served our time. Abram was 75 and at least from the passage, there was no resistance. He was a "GO!" He heard the call and responded. Age or years of service have no place for us. Not if we believe scripture. And the story about Abram just flushes that reasoning down the proverbial toilet.

The second response I often hear is that I am not able. I do not have the skills. I do not have the abilities. There are other people far more talented than I

am. Get them to handle the work load.
Get them to do the job.

Again, scripture teaches that God uses the least of these. God goes to a couple who is barren, unable to have children, in order to set up a great nation and to bless all of the families of the earth.

You see I think we have it all backwards. We are thinking as human beings. We are not thinking as God thinks. The issue is not about me and my skills and my abilities. No, the issue is about God's promise and the fact that with God all things are possible. Believing the unbelievable is the issue.

Realizing you do not have the required abilities and skills, but are willing to lean on God so God can show you the way.

That's what this faith is all about. It "ain't about you." It "ain't about me!" No, the Christian faith is about God and God alone. As the last temptation of Jesus declared, "Worship God only and him alone serve."

The final element in this passage is probably the most important: do you really believe in the promises of God? Do you believe God lives up to God's promises? Does God come through or is this Christian faith just a "feel good" experience?

Every Sunday morning, we have the Prayer of Confession and the Assurance of Pardon. I often wonder in many of our congregations if people have a sense of forgiveness. If people have a sense of having been forgiven. Or is it just ritual we go through? Kind of like saying the Apostles' Creed or repeating the Lord's Prayer.

Do we experience the reality of God's promises that we are forgiven, that our life is redeemed, and that we can move forward? It means, I think, that my life will be different as a result of that promise of God that we are forgiven if we are honest with God and confess our sins.

See, sometimes, I wonder if we believe God's promises?

-God is with me at all times.

-God says the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

-God works through our weaknesses to bring God's glory.

-God loves the sinner, but not the sin.

-God says pray for your enemies.

-God declares love always wins

-God loves me even with all my quirks and faults.

-God makes miracles happen even today.

-God will not put on us more than we can handle.

And on and on.....

I just wonder if we really claim God's promises and live by them or if they are crutches we pull out when we have an injury or a need. Are they part of our Faith DNA or just good words to quote?

1. I'm too old
2. I'm not talented
3. I'm unsure about God's promises.

All convenient excuses for us about our response to God's call and to God's claim on our lives. All of which each of

us have to wrestle with this Lenten Season.

But now, I'm going to go from preaching to meddling. We have heard what the Bible story says. We see what it is talking about. But now, I want to apply this story to the church: Second Presbyterian Church.

It seems to me that it is an appropriate application of the text:

- we are too old
- we are not able
- we are unclear of God's call to us.

I find this passage appropriate about Second Church, about its history, about its future. For over 170 years, God has kept

God's promises to this congregation. God has not abandoned us. We are the product of how many generations of faith, God-fearing disciples?

And now it is our opportunity, our responsibility. Are we standing on God's promises or are we proceeding out of fear and anxiety? Wringing our hands over what to do? Or claiming God's promises for us to be faithful disciples?

What do you think God's promise is for Second Church? Where is God leading Second Church? Where is the "land that I will show you?" Do we have any clue where God is leading us? And

are we willing to follow that lead or are we just stuck with nowhere to go?

If that is the case, what is holding us back? What is our "stuckness?" Is it tradition, is it our history, is it this historical building, is it fear?

All of which are probing questions, but not scary questions. Remember on a number of occasions in scripture, God or the angels declare FEAR NOT! Live out of hope, not out of fear. That is what Abram did because he believed God's promises. He believed God's word. And out of that belief, Abram responded.

What will be our response personally and congregationally? And from our

response, what will Jesus believe about us?

Hmmmmmmm

GENESIS 12: 1-4

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.