

**Second Sunday of Easter**  
April 28, 2019  
Christ the Rock Lutheran Church  
Farmington, NM

**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.”

<sup>2</sup>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?” <sup>3</sup>And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

<sup>4</sup>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.” <sup>5</sup>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.”

<sup>6</sup>Abraham believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (NIV1984)

**“True Treasure Is Trust in God’s Promises”**

Some people just have that special something. Most people in our area are by now aware that The Rock, Kevin Hart, and Jack Black are staying in Farmington while filming the next installment of the Jumanji movie. The response by people in our community is unmistakable. Maybe it’s true of all movie stars. But people are just drawn to some of their heroes. The Rock possesses this magnetism. It’s not just popularity or celebrity status, but some personal charisma that is contagious.

We do the same thing with people in the Bible when it comes to our faith. Hebrews chapter eleven recaps the heroes of faith. And if we were to establish a faith hall of fame, then Abraham would be one of the first elected by unanimous ballot. Abraham has a lot to teach us about faith. He can teach us about ourselves and the nature of faith. And what Abraham teaches us isn’t so much what you can do or what you could be, but rather what you do have. The faith you share with Abraham is yours because it is God’s gift to you. We see that faith isn’t so much about what is inside of you, the size or character or strength of your faith, but it’s more about God’s promises. Faith is more about God’s ability to keep his promises to you and the confidence he develops in his children. When it comes to faith, we learn from Abraham that faith is the treasure that trusts in God’s promises.

It’s easy to say I could be like a popular celebrity or be as generous as a millionaire movie star if I had what they had. We could do the same thing with Abraham. I would have the same kind of faith that he had if I had his life. If I had his special relationship with God. If I

had a chance to speak to God face to face. If I had all his gifts. Then I would have that rock star, hall of fame faith Abraham had.

Abraham didn't have to deal with the things we deal with. He didn't live in the world we face. He didn't have to confront this painful reality where you follow advise, you do well or at least well enough in school, you learn a skill and you prepare yourself for success, but then the other end of the bargain doesn't come through for you. You still struggle. You never get ahead. You never have this sense of financial peace, like everything is all going to be fine. Abram must not have had the same kind of disappointments we experience today. He must not have had to deal with the dismal track record of the people in whom he trusted. Abraham must not have faced the same kind of let downs we get from the people who mean the most to us in our lives. People who don't just let us down but keep stooping to colossally abysmal lows. Abram must not have had to deal with family members who so clearly and unmistakably turn their backs on family values, who disappoint their loved ones in the areas that matter most to us. Abram must not have had to deal with the scattered wreckage of broken promises. To have the kind of confidence described in the Bible, Abram must not have had to mop up the mess of disappointments because he had misplaced his confidence in the people around him.

To have that unique level of confidence that the Bible commends in Genesis chapter fifteen, Abram must have had something different than what we have. In a book published a few years ago by a journalist investigating common roots of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, the author comes across a suggestion in one of his interviews. Sheikh Abu Sneina, imam of El-Aksa Mosque offers this key: "You have to have a true heart, you have to believe there is one God. Maybe we have different approaches, but the destination is the same."

Actually, that heart makes you and me a lot like Abraham. Remember what Abram said in Genesis 15:2-3, how he reacted right after God had given him a comforting promise and tremendous reassurance? He says: **"O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."** (Genesis 15:2,3)

In that way, we can really relate to Abraham. Right after God called Abraham to leave his homeland and promised to make him into a great nation, Abraham decided he had to take matters into his own hands. He was afraid of the powerful people in his host country and lied that his wife was actually his sister. And he did it twice, years apart. Right after this chapter, in Genesis 16 Abraham fathers a child by his wife's servant. It turned into a colossal mess.

Abram was looking around at the things he could see and touch, adding up the evidence and the things he had accomplished. And this is the problem with just having a true heart like Abram. When we depend on ourselves and trust in our strength and put our confidence in our own faith, it only leaves us more insecure, more disappointed, more empty.

There must have been something else that Abram had was actually something that Abram had that made him worthy of being our hero of faith. The LORD says it right away in Genesis 15:1 when he tells Abram: **“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”** In answer to Abram’s objections about not being able to see an offspring, not being able to hold his own son, God changes Abram’s focus. He says: **“This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.”** (Genesis 15:4)

The LORD is teaching Abram an important lesson in faith. Faith turns away from what we have and what we see. Instead, faith clings to the promises of a faithful God. Faith is confidence in God’s promises even their fulfillment appears humanly impossible, when all the earthly evidence points to the contrary, when Crime Scene Investigators would toss out these promises as speculative theories or junk science.

Hebrews chapter eleven describes heroes of faith who lived with this kind of faith. Abraham packed up his family and all his belongings and left his home without holding a map or having access to the master plan for his life. Abraham became a father even when medical professionals would have deemed his body and the body of his wife biologically incapable of having children. Heroes such as Abel, Enoch, and Noah lived confidently throughout their lives even though they never got to see the fulfillment of God’s promises to them until they arrived home in heaven.

But faith isn’t just believing something, having confidence in something whatever approach you choose. Remember what God did for Abram after he corrected him, after he clarified that Abram’s son would in fact come and would be his own flesh and blood, his own biological child? In Genesis 15:5 God takes Abram outside and says: **“Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be.”** He wasn’t telling Abram to trust harder, to do more, or believe better.

God is the one who makes the promise. God is the one who will make it happen. The key is to have faith in God, confidence in the one who does what he says. Faith is nothing without the reliability of the one who promises. Faith is empty if there is no real treasure as its basis.

Leupold: “Perhaps the most marvelous thing about this word is the clearness with which it rules out all efforts and attainments of man as contributory factors in the justification. Work righteousness is completely eliminated, a fact which again human reason might never have discerned but for divine exposition (Rom 4; Gal 3). But the only factor that counts in this transaction is faith, and even faith only in so far as it grasps God’s promise, not faith as an achievement of man.” (p.477)

The believer’s faith doesn’t rest on a broken promise, it isn’t defined by my own strength, it doesn’t consist of what is going on inside my believing heart. Faith rests on the Seed, the offspring of Abram, who gave ultimate fulfillment to the promises made to Abram. Faith finds confidence in the only one who was ever completely righteous, Jesus Christ. My confidence for life comes from the life of Jesus. The flawless life of Jesus gives flawed and sinful people the confidence to stand before our righteous and holy Lord. The purifying

blood of Jesus shed on his cross gives me peace in an insecure and chaotic world. The resurrection of Jesus gives me confidence for treasure beyond this life. Jesus promises his believers **“treasure in heaven...where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”** (Luke 12:33)

And here's the thing about the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It doesn't just cancel out my unrighteousness. It doesn't just remove all my doubts and unkept promises. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross doesn't just eliminate my debt with God and leave me with a blank slate, a new neutral starting place to work on all the things I've failed at in the past. The perfect life of Jesus Christ is now your righteousness and mine. Everything he did right is now yours. His perfection is credited to you. His flawless life is counted as yours. It is because of the righteousness that comes through Christ that you and I can follow Abraham with confident faith.

What would you do if you found a product, an appliance or automobile, that really and truly was reliable, that lived up to all its promises? You wouldn't claim responsibility for its quality craftsmanship. But you would go back to it again and again. You would use it and recommend it as much as possible.

God's word gives you the promise that you are in a right relationship with God only because of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. Your baptism reminds you that God put his name on you to claim you as his child. His promises to you last well after all the water has dried up. His body and blood of the Lord's Supper offer and give you new life, forgiveness, salvation. God promises it. God makes it happen.

Do you want to have the confidence of Abram in your life? God has given you the treasure of righteousness through Jesus Christ. God has given you his promises. God's promises give confidence for life and last through the next life.  
Amen.