



# CRUSADER LUTHERAN CHURCH

God's Vision Our Mission

## Pray Boldly: God Wants to Hear The Good, Bad & the Ugly

Sermon for **February 28, 2010** — The Second Sunday in Lent

**Pastor Sandra Cox Shaw**

*Abram shows that we can share frustration, confusion and even anger during prayer. God patiently listens ... loves & protects us ... and keeps His promises.*

**Scriptural Reference:** **Genesis** 15:1-12, 17-18, **Luke** 13:31-35

**I** get frustrated with our lectionary when it drops right in the middle of a story, and so the preacher has to either not clue you in on what happened earlier, or just try to make the sermon with what's there. This morning, Genesis really frustrated me. Did you notice how it opened: "After these things...." Well, who's not going to say, "What things? After what things?"

So we'll do a quick review. Abram is introduced to us in Genesis 11. In Chapter 12, God communicates with Abram the promise that he will become the father of a great nation. Following God's direction, Abram leaves his home and wanders around Egypt. He then settles in Canaan.

In Chapter 14, he is obedient to God and refuses gifts from the king of Sodom — although this is a good time to say that we all know the Bible was not **written** in chapters. Human beings put that on there. There was a printer in Germany in the 16th century that did that, and he sold more Bibles than anybody else in town, just so we know. I'm telling you chapters so that you can find them.

So we're in Chapter 15, and God comes to talk to Abram again. Now, there's two people that I just love how they talk to God. Number one is Moses. Moses just really knows how to talk to God. And the other is Abram. Abram still has no children, and it's been quite a while since God has talked about this — some scholars say as long as 25 years, waiting to hear from God about the child he's supposed to have.

So we enter in today's reading. Now, I want to see if you have had an experience similar to this text, whether you know it or not. Let's play a game here: I think you're a



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wonderful congregation. I think you're faithful. I think you are the best parishioners any pastor could have. What do you think is coming next?

*But* ... I really wish you would sit at the front. *But* — you know when it's coming. You know by the tone. It happens on a job review: "We think you do a great job, you're always on time ... *but*, you don't quite meet our standards." Or when you're dating: "Gee Suzy, you're a really sweet girl, and you're really pretty, and I really like you ... *but*, we need to date other people." You've got my point.

Well, think of that when you listen to Abram and God. God starts off with these wonderful, wonderful words — and they're great words. "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." Wow. God's protecting, God's going to provide — not just some good stuff, but very great rewards.

*But*, Abram says: "But, O Lord my God, I continue childless, and a slave born in my house born in my house will be my heir." Then God interrupts with his own *but*. "But the word of the Lord came to him." That's God's reaction. God tells Abram to look to the stars in the sky, and tells Abram that his offspring will be as many as the stars. God goes on to remind Abram how God had led Abram out from Ur, and given him land, and given him blessing.

And then Abram starts it up again. *But*, God ... *but*, oh Lord ... how am I to know? How am I to know for sure you're going to do this?

Then the text gets really confusing. I did a lot of research on that, and I'm not sure I'm more than just a little clear on what happens next: the cutting in two of the sacrificial animals. The best I can find, they were cut in two and laid like this. It was a ceremony usual in that time, customary in that time, to seal a covenant. It was how people made a promise to one another.

The animals would be laid down; the people would walk in between here and would say something along the lines of, "May I be like these animals — cut in two — if I break our promise." Does it make a little bit more sense there?

Now, God doesn't need to participate in human rituals to show that God's promises are true. When God promises, a promise is a promise. It was done for Abram's benefit. We human beings tend to need signs and tangible things to remind us of God's promises. That is why God communicates to us through everyday, tangible elements in the sacraments.

Now Iti, who went through my confirmation class — we went through that together — knows what a sacrament is: It is a visible sign of an invisible promise. Because we people need reminding of things. We have to feel the water of baptism. We have to taste the

wine and bread to remember sometimes what God has promised: That God will protect us, that God is our shield, that God loves us, and we are never alone.

Our reading ends with Abram dreaming of a smoking firepot and a flaming torch — probably because of the way God appeared in Egypt. I'm not sure why. But to Abram, it was a vision of God walking between the animals, so Abram was satisfied that he could trust in God's word.

So what can we learn from Abram? This past week, at our Wednesday night study, we focused on prayer. We talked about how to pray, and about how we really love the days when we feel like we're talking with God all day long, throughout our day.

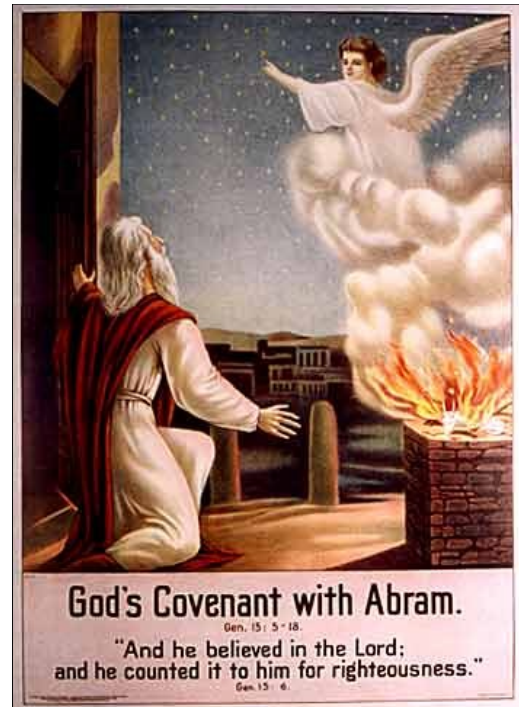
We talked about how God invites us to bring **everything** — the good, the bad the ugly — to our prayer lives. We talked about Tevye and *Fiddler on the Roof*, and how he is such a wonderful example of talking to God throughout the whole day. I think he talked to God sort of like Moses and Abram did.

**I**n Abram, I see our human frailty — but I also see our courage. If the voice of God said to me, "Do not be afraid, Sandra, I am your shield, and your reward shall be very great," I think I would be pretty speechless. I'd like to think I would at least say, "Thank you." I don't think I would feel inclined to say, "But ... God ... you have not given me this or that."

However, God does not get angry with Abram. You see, Abram had faith in God, but Abram was confused of the details: How was God going to pull this off? He didn't lose faith in God, but he was confused about how God was going to do this.

**The first thing we learn is that it's OK to take our laments and confusion to God.** When we don't understand the details of God's promise, it's OK to ask about it. I often do not understand what God is doing in my life or the life of Crusader, and I often wonder how God is going to work things out. But I never lose faith that God is guiding us.

I believe we're going to grow. I believe that we are a very healthy community that will become healthier, emotionally and spiritually. I believe that someday we won't have quite



**God's Covenant with Abram**

Artist unknown

1906

linen poster

as much wood showing in the pews.

But I don't know how God's going to do it. That's the fun part, in a way: Waiting to see how God surprises us. But it's also the scary part, isn't it? Because we don't know how God is going to do that. And I'm very glad that confusion does not equal unfaithfulness in God's world — that God thinks it's OK for me to be confused about how God's going to do it.

I experienced that for two years after I graduated from seminary, when I waited for a church. And I yelled at God sometimes: "What are you doing? You told me to go to seminary. Where's my church?"

But you see, God knew what he was doing. He was preparing me for you and you for me. So it's good to remember that we have to be patient. God works on God's timetable — *kyros* time. We operate on *chronos* time.

Secondly, about Abram: I love that God is patient with Abram. I'm not very good at patience, and neither was Abram. We know eventually he did sleep with Hagar and had Ishmael as a son, and that created a chain of events that we still see going on in the Middle East. But still, God did not withdraw God's promise made to Abram. Abram, who God later renamed Abraham, was indeed the father of a huge nation. Abraham's descendents did indeed become as many as the stars in the sky.

**So there's some good news I have for you this morning: God is faithful, God protects us, God wants to comfort us.** Didn't you love the image that Jesus spoke as he looked at Jerusalem: "How I have wanted to comfort you like a mother hen with her chicks. It was hard to decide what to preach on this morning, because that is such a beautiful text.

God wants to comfort us and protect us, and God loves us. God keeps God's promises. Sometimes we have to wait to see those — and that's a time when it's a wonderful time to have a community. Because if I'm feeling low and feeling impatient, you cheer me up. You encourage you ... you encourage you ... and we all encourage one another as we wait for God's promises, and as we're patient and faithful.

Yes, we may get impatient with God — but the really good news for me this morning is that God does not give up on us. God never gets too impatient with us, and I think that's very good news. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**