

Theme: **Reforming our lives to God's word means making the faith of Abraham ours.**

Text: Romans 4; 1 - 25

Season: 6th Sunday after Pentecost

Date: July 16, 2017

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

Grace and peace to you as you let the grace of God work in your life, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the first chapter of Romans the Apostle Paul reminded us that we are God's special children given as special relationship with Him, in the second chapter he reminded us that we are sinners and we have no excuse because God has given and written His laws on our hearts and minds, last week in the third chapter of Romans we were reminded that it is not our works that gives us redemption from all our sins but God's Amazing Grace. Today as we move to the 4th chapter of Romans and we are reminded of the incredible story of Abraham and his faith in God due to God's Amazing Grace.

Now how many of you have ever been to a circus? (Wait for a show of hands) Good then many of you can relate to the incredible stunts that the performers do in a circus. One of the acts in a circus is the acrobats swinging on a trapeze bar high overhead. Do you remember the first time that you saw these flying acrobats perform? One of the performers swings out and lets go of the bar and there for a moment he or she is in midair till the catcher, swinging on another trapeze bar, grabs them out of the air and carries them along with him and then swings them back to their trapeze bar so that they can return to where they started. It's not the performer swinging on the trapeze bar that thousands of people yearly pay come to see, but it's that breathless moment when the performer let's go of their bar and is in midair does some trick until the catcher on the other bar grabs them and then sends them back to safety. When you see all the stunts that these acrobats are do in the air you might say, "That's incredible."

Our Gospel and our Epistle reading for today gives us two examples of those incredible breathless moments, like watching the performer on a trapeze letting go of his bar and doing a stunt only to be caught just at the right time to be saved from falling and giving Him or her the opportunity to make it back safely. The performers on the trapeze are only able to do those stunts because they have faith in their catcher. In our gospel lesson, Matthew was only able to get up and out of his tax collectors booth and follow Jesus because he had faith in Jesus' words. It was one of those breathless moments when Jesus walked up to Matthew and said, "**Follow me.**" Matthew had to let go of all the worldly things he had held onto all his life and there he was for a moment in

midair till Jesus' hands reach down and grab a hold of him to show him the way to real safety. It is an incredible story about this disciple Matthew who would later do even more incredible things by God's Amazing Grace, including writing His Gospel with God's hand always holding tightly to him by faith. Jesus gave Matthew the ability to let go of the things of this world and by faith to do things that he would have never thought he could ever do, that's God incredible Amazing Grace. That's what Jesus meant when he said: "**I desire mercy, not sacrifice.**" Matthew knew his sinfulness and received God's mercy so that by faith he could tell others of God's incredible Amazing Grace.

Another example of God's incredible Amazing Grace can be found in the life of Abraham. Now Abraham was by no means some magnificent man. In fact, Abraham was a lot like each and of us. He was called by God to be set apart from the rest of the world. We have been called to be in this world yet, set apart from this world by our baptism to be a child of God. God through our baptism has called each of us to be His own and has given us a promise of the forgiveness of all our sins, eternal life with Him and the faith to let go of the things of this world so that we can be caught in the hands of Jesus Christ.

Abraham to was given a promise and he believed it. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. God promised Abraham that one of His descendants would be the one who would save the world from God's wrath and bring peace back between God and man. God promised Abraham that his offspring would be so numerous that they would be as countless as the stars and that He would have a Son through His wife Sarah. Now when you hear all this and you don't know the rest of the story of Abraham you might think that what Abraham did wasn't such an incredible leap of faith. You might even think to yourself; "I would like to have been in Abraham's place."

Well you know what, we are in Abraham's place and we to have received a promise from God. We have been promised that God will provide us with all that we need for this body and mind of ours to be safe now and for eternity. We are promised that all our earthly needs will be taken care of, even to the point that we have eternal life now and for all eternity with God. God has given us His promise and even declared to us how He has fulfilled that promise for us by His Son, Jesus Christ through His Words and Sacraments.

When we start to look at Abraham life a little closer and compare him to us, we soon see that just like Abraham even though we have been given all that we need, we to have a tendency to

trust in our own abilities and not in God's promises. Just like Abraham we stop following God's Words and go on our own way only to come crying back to God when we have gotten ourselves into a fix. We like Abraham come to the realization that it is not by our own abilities or work that bring us the promises of God. They are completely given to us by God's grace and love for us. We can look at all that God has done for us and compare it to what we have done against God and find ourselves stand with Abraham in awe of God's incredible Amazing Grace.

Now what's so breath taking about Abraham's faith is that He had this faith in the promises of God and as the Apostle Paul tells us: "**He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.**" (Rom 4: 19) Here we have a man who is almost 100 years old and his wife is 90 years old. They hadn't been able to have a child for their whole married life and yet Abraham had faith that God would fulfill His promise to him and to us. Abraham believed that God would not only give him a son, through Sarah, but that one of his descendants would be the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ and that He would make him and all people righteous in God's sight even though we don't deserve any of this. Now that's incredible, isn't it?

How many of you, at the age of 100 years, would take the challenge of swinging on a trapeze and not only let go of that bar but to do a triple flip in the air, without a net, and be certain that you would be caught before you hit the ground? How many of you would like to see that incredible sight? I know that I would. Do you know what is even more incredible than that? It is that we are given the ability to have that same faith of Abrahams as we let God reform our lives through His Word. We to are given that same incredible Amazing Grace that Abraham was given so that we too can have the same faith, hope and love of God. Not by anything that we have done but by the Holy Spirit giving us faith in God's Word. We are given that same righteousness as a gift from God. And we get this incredible Amazing Grace right here from God's Word and Sacraments. That's what God's Amazing Grace is all about. It's God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

Why does God tell us about the faith of Abraham and Matthew? So that we know just how incredible God's Amazing Grace is for us, so that we can but our trust in Him and share our love for Him with others. For it is only by knowing that we have that salvation in our life that we are able to use it. It is only in know about how Christ shed His blood on the cross of Calvary for all our sins that we are able to live in the forgiveness given to us. It is only in knowing that Jesus Christ

was raised from the dead on that third day, in the first resurrection, that we are given the ability to let go of our trapeze bar in this world and let God's hands grab a hold of us. It's only in knowing that we have been made righteous in the sight of God by His incredible Amazing Grace that we are able to share the Good News of God's love with others so that they too can have a part of God's incredible Amazing Grace in their lives.

God's incredible Amazing Grace is like an incidence that happened during a forest fire about ten years ago. A forest fire fighter was battling a forest fire that had just been started and because of the thick smoke and flames he became separated from his partners. The fire grew more and more intense, and as he was assessing his situation he came across the very campers who had become trapped by the fire they had started.

The fire fighter saw that the fire would soon overtake them, which meant certain death for all of them except for one possibility. The fire fighter was equipped with a special foil, a fire-shield under which he could lie and a fire could pass over him without burning him. The only problem was that both he and the campers could not all fit under the shield. Even though the campers didn't understand all that was involved in making the shield work and didn't quite believe that they could survive under it, the fire fighter had them lie down in the hole that he had dug and then covered them with the shield. Soon flames of the fire overtook the little group. The campers were saved, but the fire fighter died. He died because he gave his own shield to the very people who had caused the fire.

Jesus Christ's righteousness is our shield. He has given it up for us so that we may live yet he has died for the very ones who have brought sin into this world. As we are over taken by the sins of this world we need to take cover under the righteousness of Jesus Christ for it is our shield and it will protect us from death. That's God's incredible Amazing Grace given to us. We may not understand it or even realize just what it cost Him, but we need to continue to let loose of our worldly trapeze bars and let God's hands hold on to us with the assurance that He will get us safely to His home prepared for us. This is God's incredible Amazing Grace that we can share with other as we let God reform our lives to His Word. Amen.

Let us pray: O Almighty God, You have given us faith in Your promises like Abraham and Matthew, help us to always let Your hands hold onto ours by the work of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with Your and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.