

MAY 5, 2024 FPCPORTHURON; PASTOR ROXIE, PREACHING SERIES: Old Stories; New Lessons; SERMON: "Faith: Patient, Persistent, Courageous"
SCRIPTURE: Genesis 12: 1-5, Hebrews 11: 8-12, 17-18

INTRODUCTION

For all of you who are here because someone Invited you specifically to worship with us today, For those of you who may be new to this particular family of God, For those of you who come frequently to be together on Sunday morning, I want all of you to know that I am a Preacher who preaches **Topical Scriptural Series**, month by month, to help us, through faith, to navigate the circumstances in our lives, in our community and in this world.

GOD CHANGES US

I believe that God can change our lives for the better; when we choose to have Jesus intimately involved in our lives. Jesus not only brings us the many faceted teachings on love, which is so needed in our world today—one step at a time!! But Jesus also shares with us His way of life—How he "does life."

COMMUNION—CROSS/RESURRECTION

And then Jesus goes far beyond our expectations, sacrificing Himself on the cross So that our waywardness would be forgiven and eternity would be offered in His Resurrection. Today we celebrate all of that, just as we do the first Sunday of each new month. We remember God's graceful gift in Jesus every time we eat the bread and drink the cup—a reminder (lest we forget) a sign of what Jesus has done for us—for that matter, has done for everyone, offering eternal life—that begins here and now and extends all the way into the hereafter.

PREACHING SERIES FOR MAY

The Preaching Series for the month of May is: Old Stories, New Lessons. Even the people in the "Old Testament" had faith. They put their trust in God. We can learn from that. They knew that **God is always "faithful," even in the tough times when they—and we need to be "rescued."** (Today God's faithfulness was portrayed in the Song: "Great is Thy Faithfulness" as sung by the Adult Choir)

And those people of old, thousands of generations ago, have handed down to us their faith in a **God who loves, saves and rescues** those who are **broken**—which is all of us, whether you know it or not. And in particular today,

Abraham and Sarah, the forefather and mother of the **Jewish Faith and subsequently the Christian Faith. Abraham and Sarah reveal a faith that is patient, persistent, and courageous.** As attributes of their faith, I am going to give examples of those three characteristics—in opposite order of what you see on the front of your bulletin, which historically is a better order.

ABRAHAM

I will speak more about Abraham than Sarah. Because Sarah will get her “Starring Moment” next week when we look at several “mothers” in the Bible, portrayed by the children (at the Traditional Service) and by me and other women at the First Light Service; all in recognition of Mother’s Day.

COURAGEOUS

Through their faith and trust in God, Abraham and Sarah (as spoken in Genesis (Old Testament) and affirmed in Hebrews (New Testament—we read both today), They had courage—faith—to follow God’s call. They had faith--courage to leave their home, their family, their way of life in Haran—trusting God to lead them to a new land. They had no idea where they were going, even though, as the story progresses, it is apparent they are going to the Land of Canaan. (400 miles away from Haran—they made the trek on foot). They were willing to take the risk, because they believed in the promises of God and listened to the calling of God. They had faith—courageous faith. They believed that if they followed God, God would be present with them, care for them, and bless them, which God did.

Do we have that kind of faith—courageous faith? I believe that we do. Your leadership in this church is not afraid to take risks—to try something new, whether it succeeds or fails—not necessarily trusting their own intellect but trusting that God will give them the wisdom to choose wisely the way this congregation should go. I have always thought, better to reward God’s people for risking—Than to reward us for being successful. Moving in God’s direction always takes Courageous Faith.

Linda Lee

There is a woman who has started coming to this church just recently—about a month ago. She felt the pull of God towards coming back to church and to this particular congregation. Was she afraid—nervous—when she first came—She didn’t know any of us (maybe some of you visitors today feel the same way), but she persisted and as she says, she found a congregation that is willing to be courageous and compassionate in their welcoming of new people. Faith has a lot to do with trust and courage, So well demonstrated by Abraham and Sarah, Old Story—New Lesson.

PERSISTENT

Faith is also about being persistent in being in relationship with God—talking with God on a regular basis. And sometimes being vulnerable and bold in our requests, before God—persistent and repetitive. Abraham demonstrates his faithful persistency in talking with God. He knew God. Abraham was very troubled that the three strangers (two angels and the Lord) who had come to tell Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child, late in life, those angels and Lord were on their way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wicked ways.

But Abraham knows that his nephew Lot and his family live in Sodom.

So Abraham boldly and persistently goes to the Lord, asking if he will save Sodom—there are righteous people, among the wicked. Of course, he is thinking of his righteous nephew Lot and his family. With that in mind, Abraham starts this count down with God—If there are 50 righteous people in Sodom, will you destroy the city? The Lord answers “No.,” Then Abraham is so bold as to say: “If there are only 45, 40, 30, 20, 10. Abraham is persistent but so is God in saying, “No, I will not destroy the city.” Well, when the angels get there, there is only Lot, his wife, and their two daughters who are righteous. Only four who are worthy to be saved. OK—so you want to hear the rest of the story, you will have to read Genesis Chapter 18, 19.

This is a cliffhanger—what actually happens!! But my point is this: Abraham has such a close relationship with God that he can ask him--- anything. Believe it or not, it is the same for us!

Talking to God is prayer! God has big shoulders and a generous heart. We can go to God with anything. So **I recommend that you nurture your relationship to God** and be Persistent in your faith, talking with God on a regular basis, presenting to God your brokenness, your flawed character, your joys and your concerns.

PATIENCE

But with Persistence comes Patience! Now you and I both know that there are times when God doesn't work or provide as quickly as we think God should. We get frustrated, perhaps anger, or just plain “fed up” with the ways of God. Unfortunately, or fortunately, we get anxious and then at some point, we realize, everything is in God's timing! Early on in the Abraham and Sarah story, we read this in Genesis Chapter 15: God is speaking to Abram (name changes later on to Abraham—whole other story); “Do not be afraid, Abram, “I am your shield. Your very great reward.”

But Abram 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?" And Abram is a bit irritated with God: "You have given me no children, so a servant in my household will be my heir." Then the word of the Lord comes to Abraham: "This man will not be your heir, But a son coming from your own body will be your heir." God takes him outside and says, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars, if indeed, you can count them. Your offspring will be as many as the stars." Believe it or not, Abraham believes the Lord. Abraham put his faith in the Lord and is patient. Sarah—not so much. You need to read the story about Sarah's maidservant, Hagar and her son Ishmael (the father is Abraham). Read it--same area in the Bible—Genesis 15-16.

When this promise is made that Abraham and Sarah will be the father and mother of many nations, Abraham is in his 70's. But the birth of a child, Isaac, through Sarah, is not until Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90. Faith always involves Patience—Patiently trusting that God knows the road ahead for each of us—which we, do not know.

PRICE SMITH

In conclusion, I have asked Price Smith, our musician for the First Light Worship, to sing, "Rescued" a song that he wrote both the melody and the words. It was on the occasion of his father's death. It can be applied to his father, to Price himself, to all of us. And I think this song "Rescue" could be applied to Abraham and Sarah—they were rescued so many times by God so that God's purposes could be accomplished through them. And that we could learn from them that Faith is Patient, Persistent and Courageous. "Rescued" is a song for all of us in our brokenness. It is clear in Communion that we are "rescued" by God, in Jesus Christ, from a life of sin—of hate—of fear to a life of righteousness, of love and of joy. Thanks be to God—who rescues, not only Abraham and Sarah, but who rescues all of us, if we put our trust in God—In Jesus Christ-- Emmanuel—God With Us.