



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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February 17, 2008  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent  
Genesis 12:1-8  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Genesis 12:1-8  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 121  
Second Lesson: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17  
Gospel: John 4:5-26

### Live on Promises

A promise is something you take on faith, right? Someone promises something and on faith you believe them or maybe you don't believe them. If I promise to you that this Sermon will be exactly 9 minutes and 52 seconds, you are either going to believe me or not, but it's something on faith. It's something that you aren't going to know. If I promise you that you are sitting on wood, that's not a matter of faith at all, is it? It's pretty obvious. You are sitting on a pew.

So as we look at these promises that God makes to Abram, we see how Abram lived on these promises, but you also notice that they just required a great deal of faith. They were things that you couldn't see. This wasn't a matter of saying "I promise you, you are sitting on wood." This was making promises that were just incredible, unbelievable and unfathomable that God could actually keep them. But we see Abram living on promises.

God made them and God gave him the confidence and the faith in Him, and it changed Abraham. It changed his life. It made him into something more than what he would have been on his own, and it certainly pointed him in a direction he would have never chosen on his own. In reality, God's promises do the same thing for you and me. He makes them and he gives us the confidence to believe them, and that changes us.

Think about how this was a promise that God made to him. It starts out with just a complete absolute matter of faith. God comes to Abram and says "Go to the land I will show you." Abram couldn't even stop and ask for directions even if he would have wanted to as a man because he had no idea where he was going. God just said "Get up and go." So he got up and left Ur of the Chaldeans and went to Haran. He stayed there awhile. God came to him when he was in Haran after God had blessed him and given him numerous possessions and gave him physical success and came and said "Now, go to this land and I am going to give it to you." So when Abraham gets there, he gets to the land, and what does he see? The Canaanites are living in the land, and what does God come and tell him? "The land that your feet are standing on, I am going to give that to your descendants."

That promise took an awful lot of faith, didn't it? He is 75 years old and his wife is 65. They have no child at that time and yet, "I am going to give this land that is inhabited to your descendants," and he doesn't have any. But these are promises that he makes to him. And God had given him this sevenfold promise. "I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless

those who bless you. I will curse those who curse you. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Seven promises and each one of them demanded faith. God made them to him.

“I will make you into a great nation”—again, the faith that is demanded! He had no descendants. But within 600 years his descendants numbered over 2,000,000. God made the promise. God kept the promise.

“I will bless you.” The word itself means all the various blessings that God gives and in Abraham’s life, God certainly blessed him physically. He was one of the wealthiest men of his day.

“I will make your name great.” Halfway around the world we are gathered together on a miserable morning talking about Abram. Did God keep that promise?—most certainly.

“I will bless those who bless you.” God promises blessing to those who bless Abram. Abraham we are told all the time called on the name of the Lord, which involves worshipping God and proclaiming Him. Abraham in his own right was a prophet of a type because he taught others about God and His promises. Just like today, those who believe God’s promises are blessed. God blesses those who bless the speakers of God’s promise, those who take them at their word, and God works through that proclamation and blesses them. The other side of that coin is, those who reject God’s message because they have rejected God’s messenger, God curses. Spiritually they are lost.

The last one, the seventh one, is really the biggest promise that Abraham would have to live on all the days of his life. “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” This is the promise that repeated of the One who would crush the serpent’s head. This is the promise of the Savior. God makes these incredible promises, one after another, those seven, and that promise that he would give the land to his descendants, which he didn’t have, the land that was occupied.

God made these promises over and over and over, and God gave Abraham the ability, the faith to put his trust in those promises. And look at how it changed him. He left the land. He went. He did what God had called on him to do. He was a blessing, not only through proclaiming the Word, but in physical things. When Lot’s family was carried off, when the kings attacked Sodom, Abraham went and defeated the five kings. He was a blessing to all the people of Sodom even though they were wicked in God’s eyes. God blessed Abraham. His name became great because of the things that God did through him.

But for you and me, we see Abraham not just as a man who believes incredible promises, but as a man who gives us the example of faith—believing what God says to be true even when our eyes can’t see how it will be. Think of the rest of Abraham’s life—how God had to keep coming to him again and again and repeat those promises.

It’s the same way for us. God gives confidence to you and to me into the promises that He has made to us that we are forgiven; that we are loved; that He is with us; that

heaven is ours; that those who die in the Lord are with the Lord; that the bodies that we place in the ground will rise one day from the ground glorified, body and soul reunited, and we will spend eternity with God in heaven. These promises He gives to us. We don't see the results of it now. We see the pain, and we see the suffering. We see the things that threaten. We see the things that worry. So God comes to us and repeats those promises to us over and over. He repeats them in His Word. He repeats them by giving us the gift of baptism where we are clothed with Christ so we are reminded that the One who died for us is the One who will keep those promises. He gives it to us in the Lord's Supper, the very body and blood that was given and shed. He gives us His Word which gives us the gospel. It gives us the assurance of forgiveness. But He doesn't stop there. He gives us the Sacraments so that we have this redundant proclamation of the gospel so that the promises get into our head so that we can live on these promises and they can change us. We don't see the end result. We sing "Heaven is our Home," but we don't see that home. We sing "I Know That My Redeemer Lives," but we don't see his visible presence.

But we believe it. We trust it. Yes, there are times we don't trust it as we should. There are times you and I doubt God's love and God's mercy and God's grace. There are times we don't act in faith even though God has equipped us to do so. At those times we have to humbly say "Lord, forgive me. I haven't trusted you as I should. Lord, strengthen me through this forgiveness that you give me so that I can be changed and I can have this confidence; so that I can go through life knowing that heaven is my home and knowing what blessings await me."

We need God's strength so that we keep going to those promises. We need God's strength so that we keep finding His strength so that we believe and we carry on when there are so many things in our daily life that worry us. God will give it to us. He kept coming to Abraham and he led that 90-year-old man to believe he would have a child. And 10 years later, He gave it to him.

God has come to us and said "I know your sins, but they are all covered in my blood. They are all forgiven through me." That leads us to put our trust in Him.

I can promise you a 9 minute 52 second Sermon, but who knows whether or not I will keep it. I certainly don't. I can promise you a lot of things in life, but I have no power to back them up. But the One who created this world, the One who lived and died to take away the sins of this world, when he says something to us, we can put our faith in it because we know that He has greater ability than we do, and He will strengthen us and enable us to put our trust in Him.

What He asks us to do is to keep spending time with Him in His Word and Sacraments and let Him do the work of strengthening us. By God's grace, He will!