



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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July 28, 2013

Pentecost 10

Sermon Text: [Genesis 18:20-32](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 18:20-32](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 6](#)

Second Lesson: [James 5:13-18](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 11:1-13](#)

The Believer Follows Christ: Followers of Christ Pray Boldly

Trusting in God's grace

Submitting to God's will

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear Christian friends:

Endearing...annoying...sometimes it's a thin line, isn't it? Did you ever notice how quickly children can go from being cute with those puppy dog eyes if they come and ask you for something and it starts melting your heart? How many times has it taken them to repeat the same question until that melting heart turns to an ice of stone and you are just kind of annoyed and tell them to go away? Endearing to annoying can go from 0 to 60 a lot quicker than any Porsche or Audi, right? We can be that way.

Have you ever thought about it from a different point of view? Endearing...annoying...in your walk with your Savior? How often are you endearing to him? How often are you annoying? Even more than annoying. Think for a minute how you and I are just flat out sinners. There isn't anything cute about our sin. It's not like a grandkid knocking over a lamp and Grandpa goes, "Oh, that's cute. That's alright." There isn't anything cute in how you and I sin. We are more than annoying to our God. We can't melt God's heart like butter by anything we say or do. You can't put on puppy dog eyes and try to manipulate God into loving you. You have nothing to offer him. The only thing you and I have is what he has given us first.

You and I can be bold and ask him for things that we don't deserve, like forgiveness, because he has said, "I have forgiven you through the life and death of Jesus Christ." You and I can be bold in prayer because he's called on us to do it. He's told us to be bold. Be persistent. Be like that guy that knocks on his neighbor's door at midnight. Because God has given us that promise, we know that it's not annoying when we pray to our Heavenly Father. It's what he has asked us to do. When you stop and think about it, because you and I don't deserve anything from him, but he has loved us first and taken away our sins, and now he says, be like that pestering kid that's bugging you when you are trying to get something done, what an incredible blessing and privilege Christian prayer is. And as followers of Christ, we see today that you and I can pray boldly. That's what we focus on this morning...The Believer Follows Christ: Followers of Christ Pray Boldly. So we'll look at Abraham's bold prayers and learn that we should pray trusting in God's grace. Part of praying boldly is also praying submitting to God's will.

In your life, you probably had some great days, some days you just love, some days you wish would never end. I have to believe in what I read to you a little bit earlier from Genesis 18, that had to be one of those days in Abraham's life. Not because of the prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah, but because of what happened earlier. Earlier in the day, three guys stopped by where Abraham had pitched his tent. He was a wandering nomad, so there his camp was. He was a well-to-do man, so it was probably a large camp. Three guys wander into it and Abraham greets them with hospitality. He tells his wife, "Go get 20 quarts of flour and make some bread." He tells one of the servants, "Hey you! Run off. See that heifer over there? Go butcher it and get it ready to make a meal for them." He takes care of these men's needs. You might remember that part of the story.

After they had done all this and they were well fed, God revealed himself to Abraham and said to him, "When I come back at this time next year, that son I promised that you would have 74 years ago, which you still don't have, he is going to be here." If you remember, Sarah heard it. She is off in the corner by the tent, and she's laughing, "Like that's going to happen." Do you remember those events?

The three men start to leave and two go on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah and Abraham plants himself in front of the Lord. When the men got up to leave, it says right before our text, they looked down toward Sodom and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." That's what brings you to what I read to you. The Lord says to Abraham, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great. I am going to go down and see it." God knows what the outcry is. That's just for you and for me and for Abraham and for all the other readers of that section to know that God does not act without evidence. He doesn't act on a whim. He's not like a child that's torturing a fly or holding a magnifying glass over an ant hill. The Lord acts on evidence. That's what that is there to teach us. He shows Abraham what he is going to go do is based on sin, sin which obviously Abraham probably knew well.

Abraham knew the evidence was overwhelming and God was going to destroy that city because of their sin. Their sin wasn't that they didn't receive those two men, those angels, or the inhospitality. Their sin was the sin of homosexuality. No matter what popular opinion of any age might say, the eternal unchanging God says this is sin. He tells Abraham he is about to act.

Does Abraham's response surprise you? God is going to act to punish evildoers. God is going to act to punish the wicked. When we had our Priority of Ministry listening meetings, one of the responses that came as a threat is the society around us, and I almost got the impression they wished God would act to punish evildoers more quickly and more readily. But that's not what Abraham does. Abraham stands in front of God,

face to face with God, he understands it's the Lord, and he starts pestering him like a little kid. Fifty. Five less. Forty. Thirty. Twenty. How about ten? Doesn't it sound like a kid trying to annoy and manipulate their parents into what they want? Isn't that exactly what it sounds like he's doing? And he's doing it so that God would spare the whole city. He doesn't say to just spare the righteous. He wants him to spare the whole city.

How often do you find yourself praying like that, for people that you're not related to, people that you maybe don't even like? God, bless them and spare them. God, bless them and bring them to Christ. How often do we find ourselves praying that way, boldly and persistently and in God's face? I know I don't. I could. I'm guessing you don't either. Isn't it amazing what Abraham does?

Notice that he doesn't do what we often want to do. He doesn't base his appeal on himself. He doesn't say, "Hey, God, you told me that the son that is coming in a year is going to be an ancestor to the Messiah. Since he is coming through me, can you do me a favor? Do right by me and spare the city." He doesn't say, "Lord, there are some righteous people there, and they deserve you to do this." He says, "Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He appeals to who God is, not who he is praying for and not who is doing the praying. He appeals to the grace of God to act in a way that those people did not deserve and to spare them. He knew what they deserved. That's an amazing aspect of this bold prayer.

You and I can pray like Abraham did. We can pray boldly because hopefully we've learned not to pray based on ourselves. Hopefully we've learned to pray based on the grace of God, the grace that lived and died for all our sins. That's much more powerful than anything you and I could offer to God. Yet, do you ever find yourself doing that in prayer? Do you ever approach prayer as though you're Scott Boyles negotiating some rich athlete's contract with some baseball or football team. "Lord, if you do this for me, I'll get to church more often and I'll increase my offering." Do you ever find yourself doing that? Have you ever said, "Lord, I've always tried to serve you, so please do this for me." That isn't prayer. That's negotiation. We don't negotiate with God. We should pray, "Lord, you are a gracious God. In your wisdom, if it's your will, grant this, my request." But pray boldly knowing also that whatever God's answer is, it's going to be better than any answer you could come up with.

Pray boldly by his grace. His grace saved you. His grace gave you faith. His grace leads God to continue to speak to you in Word and in Sacrament. His grace has seen to it that one day you will be like Abraham, standing face to face before God, only you'll see him in his glory, exactly as he is, and you will live because you will be in the glory of heaven. That grace that took away your sins and has promised you heaven is beyond your understanding. It's beyond my understanding. So don't understand it. Just

rejoice in it. Revel in it. And when you pray, know that his promises of grace surround to sustain you. Stand in awe of that love that he has for you. Stand in awe of his love and then pray boldly.

When you pray focused on his love and not just focused on your needs or your desires or your negotiating skills, you are going to probably be able to be much better at what Abraham also did. That's pray submitting to God's will. Pray trusting that God is going to give the best answer and do what is best.

I'll grant you, Abraham pushed it. I don't think I'd have the patience of God to stand there and listen to fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, ten. Would you? But he prayed boldly. And he stopped. He knew that a holy God would do what God alone knew to be best.

We aren't told what his night was like. I wonder how well he slept? Was he excited about next year the son is coming and that kept him awake? Or did he toss and turn because he wondered what is going to happen to those cities and what was going to happen to those people? Notice we are not told how soon he learned that God spared Lot and his family. All we are told is that early the next morning, Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land in the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land like smoke from the furnace. He saw the evidence of God's judgment. He knew at that point in time that God did not find ten righteous people in all of Sodom and Gomorrah.

If you remember reading anything at all about Abraham's life, wherever he went, he called on the name of the Lord. That doesn't mean that he just worshiped. It means he proclaimed who the Lord is and the promises the Lord had made. He proclaimed that God had promised that all nations on earth would be blessed through him, that a Savior would come, that eternal life is found in this promise. He proclaimed it and proclaimed it and proclaimed it. Wherever he went, to those who listened, to those who didn't listen. Now he looks down and he sees the smoke rising up. All that time he had talked. Do you think he felt like it wasn't worth it? Do you think he felt, "What's the point? I'm not talking about God anymore. I'm not going to go calling on his name in front of these people. No one listens." I have to believe that since he had a sinful nature, he was tempted to. I wonder if it was a struggle for him to continue to submit to God's will because he prayed and he prayed and he prayed and he didn't get what he wanted.

If you keep reading through the Book of Genesis, you know what Abraham did. You know the times that he did focus on God and he did submit to God's will. Remember God said, "Go and take your son, your only son, the son whom you love, the son of the promise, Isaac, and offer him to me." And Abraham was willing to go and do it, but the Lord spared him.

If you keep reading, we know how he continued to call on the name of the Lord wherever he went. He didn't say "It wasn't worth it. It didn't work." He didn't say "I didn't get my way, so I am going to wander away from God." Do you know people like that? People that in the midst of struggles, in the midst of worries, in the midst of difficult times of life prayed and prayed and prayed about something and didn't get the answer they wanted, and now they've wandered away from God. It happens, right? Do you know people, like I've often heard, say, "I don't go to voters' meetings anymore. I said what I wanted to happen at the voters' meeting and they didn't do it, so I'm not going again." We don't always focus on submitting to God's will, do we?

When we submit to God's will, it means that when we come to a decision (like at a voters' meeting), we trust the Lord has led us to that decision and we get behind it and support it. That's how we submit to God's will, whether we agree with it or not. We don't bite and devour each other and attack those who made the decision. That's not submitting to God's will. That's the exact opposite of this. But when we pray and ask God to do something and he doesn't, then we submit to his will. That's what we saw Abraham do.

The question is, are we going to focus on ourselves and how we don't get what we want? Or are we going to focus on God's love for us in Christ and see how he has given us more than we ever deserve? When we focus on God's love in Christ, we will be more ready to submit to his will and serve him in whatever way he calls us to serve him, just like Abraham did. Abraham prayed. The answer was "There isn't 10." Abraham didn't hold his breath and walk to the corner. He didn't try to come up with a new way to manipulate God. He simply submitted to God's will.

When we take the focus off ourselves and put it on the grace of God, it's a lot easier to submit to God's will. When I focus on the grace of God, I'll trust that he is going to do what is the eternal best for my soul. And it's for the good of all souls. Really, what else is our ministry about? What else do we live in this world for except the good of souls, that people come to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that they grow in that knowledge and that they share that knowledge? That's what we are here for as a congregation...to get souls ready for eternity through the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Everything else is just Law. Everything else is in essence chaff that the wind is going to blow away at the end. The meat of our life is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Keep that in mind and you'll pray boldly for souls, like Abraham did. Amen.