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St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
Year C, 2 Lent – Genesis 15  
March 13, 2022

This morning's Old Testament reading from Genesis is a pivotal moment in the story of God and God's people. It recounts a conversation between God and Abraham, but it was not their first chat. Their relationship really begins several chapters earlier, in Genesis 12 when God comes to Abraham promising blessing and prosperity; God will make Abraham the patriarch of a great nation, a holy people with holy land. The magnitude of this promise cannot be overstated. You'll recall that Abraham and his wife Sarah were not able to have children. In the ancient world, infertility was seen as a curse, and the entire social system was based on having heirs. After decades of heartache and ostracism, God's abundant promise of descendants was miraculous. Abraham does as he is told. He leaves his home and a great adventure ensues, marked by famine, prosperity, family drama, war, and victory. God continues to give Abraham instructions, and their relationship is straightforward. God speaks, Abraham listens. God commands, Abraham obeys.

But in this morning's reading, something shifts. God comes to Abraham again and begins with a big promise – "Do not be afraid, I am your shield, your reward shall be very great," God says. This time, Abraham's response is different. "Really? I'm not so sure about that," he says. "I've done everything you've asked, and yet I still don't have that heir that you have promised. How can this be?" In response, God points Abraham toward the sky and says that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. And in that moment, Abraham trusts this promise. But immediately after, the pattern repeats. God says, "Also, I am going to give you this land," and Abraham says, "Really? I'm not so sure about that." Then God has Abraham gather some animals to be sacrificed. God comes in the midst of the fire as a sign of the everlasting covenant, a promise of a chosen land for a chosen people.

This passage tells us a great deal about what it means to be in a faithful relationship with God. We can imagine that up to this point, Abraham and Sarah were living in anxious expectation for the child they have been promised. As each day and year passed, it must have felt more confusing and frustrating, especially as they tried to do everything right. In today's passage, Abraham's doubt and disappointment are palpable. And my guess is that we can identify with him. We know what it is like to wonder why certain prayers go unanswered – maybe prayers to conceive a child, prayers for healing for ourselves or ones we love, prayers for release from addiction or abuse, prayers for clarity about hard decisions, prayers for an end to violence. You can fill in your own blank.

In response to Abraham's frustration, God is not angry or vengeful. Instead, through the multitude of stars and the passing of flames, God steadfastly reiterates the promise. This response reminds us that the character of faithfulness is not unquestioning obedience or silent submission, but rather active engagement with our Creator. Sometimes, trust comes easily, especially when everything is going well. But other times, particularly when we experience pain or uncertainty or disappointment, that engagement is more of a struggle. God welcomes us in the struggle.

After God shows Abraham the stars in the sky, the text simply says that Abraham trusted and God reckoned that as righteousness. What did trust mean in that moment? The abundant stars and flame certainly didn't give details about when those descendants would start to arrive or how he might come to possess the promised land. Surely, he was anxious for more information. But even without the clarity he might have craved, those signs were enough for him to trust in God's presence and God's power. He trusts enough to take the next step and continue on the journey. The next chapters in Genesis tell us that the journey wasn't easy. The stories of his children and his children's children are fit for a Netflix drama, marked by blessing and struggle and sin, and God remains faithful to Abraham.

This passage invites us to follow Abraham's example – to trust, to hope, to have faith in God – to take the next step even without the clarity or the answers we might want. His story reminds us that answers to prayers do not always come on our timeline or in the ways that we might hope. But like him, we are welcomed by God in our questions and our struggles, and we will find that God's blessings come in many forms – often in ways we never could have anticipated. While we are not guaranteed that the journey will be easy, we are assured of God's loving presence in the midst of it. And we know that the story of the relationship between God and God's people does not end here. God's promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, whose life, death, resurrection extend to us eternal life, and who calls us to take the next step in this earthly life by following him. Amen.