

Time after Pentecost
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138;
Colossians 2:6-19; Luke 11:1-13

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Our first lesson this morning kind of plops us right into the action of what's been going on in Genesis. We really need to look at least back to the beginning of chapter 18 or actually more like going to chapter 17 to figure out the context of things. Because back in chapter 17, the Lord God Almighty has arrived on the scene to reiterate to Abram and Sarai the covenant. Now Abram's a little whiney about things, possibly because of what he knows part of the covenant entails, but as well he's asking for his son Ishmael to be blessed. And God says, 'yea, Ishmael will be blessed, don't worry about him. But Abram remember this covenant that I have made with you back when you were in the Land of Ur. This covenant is between you and Sarai and me. Now to show you though, that I am serious about this,' God says, 'there are a couple of things that we need to do. First of all, Abram, for you and all the boys there is a little bit of cosmetic surgery that needs to be done to help you remember what the covenant is all about. And second, second, you're going to get a new name. You are no longer going to be called Abram, but you will be Abraham and your wife will no longer be Sarai, but she will be called Sarah.' That was chapter 17.

Chapter 18 some guys show up at Abraham's tent. We know that these guys are really angels. And after Abraham shares with them a quick meal, they remind him that next year at this same time, Sarah will have given birth to a son. Now Sarah, she's out hiding behind the tent. She hears it, but she laughs, 'Right, I'm going to have a son, I'm past menopause, like that's really going to happen.' (Did you know that the name Isaac means "one who laughs"?) Anyway, so Sarah and Abraham they will conceive a son. That doesn't happen quite there in chapter 18 though. But after they're finished eating, Abraham and these guys get up and they begin to walk. They are walking out toward where Sodom and Gomorrah are. (Now I've always mentally pictured that they are walking along a ridge. Our Bible doesn't say anything about that.) But God looks over and he sees Sodom and Gomorrah and God says, 'you know those guys over there, their just not doing what they promised.' And so God sends the angels down to Sodom to go scope things out.

But as the Lord God and Abraham continue to talk, we also need to remember that over in the town of Sodom, that's where Abraham's nephew Lot lived. Lot has lived with Abraham and Sarah since he was ten, back when they started off in the Land of Ur when God first called Abraham and Sarah. Lot joined them then and traveled with them all through out the Middle East and into Northern Africa and settled with them there in the land of Canaan. Abraham and Lot split and Lot settled down over in Sodom and Abraham and his family settled over in the next valley over. So maybe this next little bit of conversation is a little self-centered. Maybe Abraham is looking out for his nephew, but it's interesting to me because, after looking out, God says to Abraham 'you see, you see all those useless sacks of flesh down there? They're living

only for themselves. They're living like it's just one big beer party. Live for the gusto!' (This is a Brock paraphrase by the way.)

So Abraham and God start this conversation because God says 'I am just going to wipe the whole kit and caboodle out of here. I've had it.' Abraham said, 'LORD, I am not worthy to speak in your presence, but if I were, I might ask this question: what if there were 50 righteous people there in the city of Sodom? Would you destroy all of Sodom?' 'No,' God says 'no, for 50 people I won't destroy Sodom.' So Abraham said to him 'I'm just a mere speck of dust, but take away 5. Five less than fifty, for the lack of five would you destroy Sodom?' 'No, no, Abraham, for forty-five I won't destroy Sodom.' 'Oh LORD it's such a beautiful day, isn't it a beautiful day, it's part of your creation, these are part of your creation. LORD, LORD, if there are only 40 there in Sodom, only 40, would you destroy Sodom?' 'No, not for 40, not for 30.' Finally Abraham says, 'LORD, LORD, ten, ten righteous people, if there ten righteous people would you still destroy Sodom?' As we heard in our lesson this morning in verse 32: "for the sake of 10, I will not destroy it."

Interesting conversation that Abraham has with God. How many of us bargain back and forth with God. But did you notice though that there was conversation, there was speaking and there was listening, there was questions and there was response. Two sides going on in that conversation. Two sides going on in that, would we say prayer? But I have to think, how often are there two sides going on when I pray?

Let's look at another example of pray from our lessons this morning. From our gospel we get a different set of circumstances. In chapter 10 we just finish up with the whole story of the traveler and the Samaritan, which was followed by those wacky sisters, Mary and Martha. And then Jesus goes off to pray after dealing with those folks. He goes off to pray and one of the disciples (the scripture doesn't say who, I think it was Peter because of the way that it's phrased. Because it's "Oh, Oh, Oh, teach us to pray, teach us to pray." That's the way that Peter generally talks.) But one of the disciples notices that Jesus is praying and so 'oh, oh, Lord you know John taught his disciples to pray. John did it, why don't you teach us?' And so Jesus says, 'okay, alright, I'll teach you to pray.'

Now we also just as an aside need to note that Jesus did not say all his prayers "The Lord's Prayer." But Jesus starts off (and again this is a Brock paraphrase,) Jesus starts off, 'Hi, LORD, how's it going? Nice to see you. We should really get together a little bit more often here. By the way, LORD, would you mind making certain that I've got something to eat today? Doesn't need to be anything fancy, just some basic sustenance. And LORD, would you forgive me when I mess up? And help me to forgive others when their messes interfere with me? And LORD, would you mind, if and when my faith is tested, to help me stand up to that test, and, maybe even pass that test?'

Jesus goes on to give the example that God indeed WILL answer our prayers. He gives the example that if you think it's annoying when a friend wakes you up in the middle of the night looking to borrow some food or if somebody down the hall called out for a glass of water in the middle of the night. And even though your first reaction might be to say 'no' and you are very insistent about saying 'no', if that other person continues to ask, and ask, and ask, and ask, and

ask . . . not out of friendship are you going to respond, but just to SHUT THAT PERSON UP, you're going to respond. 'How much more,' Jesus says, 'how much more when God loves us and we ask will God respond to our prayers?' But did you notice, did you notice in that prayer not only what Jesus prayed for, but what Jesus *didn't* pray? What *wasn't* demanded? There was no request for money, or glory, or honor, or fame, or wealth. To pray for those things that's along the lines of the *Theology of Glory*. That's what so many televangelists like Joel Olsten or Robert Tilton. They all say 'pray it and claim it and God will make it yours.' But I don't see that happening with this prayer that Jesus said, 'when you pray, pray like this.'

The Theology of Glory, and those who purport it, tell us to pray for ourselves. To use the cross for personal gain. Just like the old Janis Joplin song: "Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?" But right here in these prayers, (because that's really what Abraham's conversation was - a prayer) we've got the *Theology of the Cross*. We can pray for ourselves, but we pray for others as well. We pray for health, we pray for well-being, for spiritual growth, for our needs and necessities. Not our wants, not that 54" flat panel plasma monitor that I really absolutely positively need Lord, really I do. Actually, no, I don't.

Jesus asks for food, sought forgiveness, knocked on the door for salvation in the time of trial. I do know that there are two things that Lutherans are not especially noted for, one is reading the Bible and the other is prayer, especially in public. But I still need to ask you, do you talk to God on a regular and frequent basis?

The Barna Group, a faith based research group, has done several surveys over the years, specifically concerning prayer. They've discovered that four out of five adults in the U.S. will pray typically during a week. Women though are more likely to pray than men. Here in the northeast we are the least likely to pray of those here in the U.S. People will pray about many things, the majority of adults indicate that when they pray they thank God for what God has done in their lives. They ask God for forgiveness for specific sins and acknowledge God's unique and superior attributes and they will ask for specific needs or desires to be met. But what struck me as most interesting in this list of statistics, was that it is less common for people to be silent during times of prayer in order to listen to God's response. Less than half made that time in their prayer. So what do you pray for, and how often DO you pray? How long do your prayers last? The average prayer, according to Barna, lasts less than five minutes.

Now, we need to realize though that our prayers are not always answered in the way that we want them too. That's another difference between the Theology of Glory and the Theology of the Cross. The Theology of Glory said our prayers will be answered and you will get what you want, and if you don't then your faith isn't strong enough. The Theology of the Cross said, your prayers will be answered, maybe not the way you want them to, but your prayers will be answered.

We have that example of the Theology of the Cross with the story of Abraham. Remember what Abraham asked - ten Lord, all I am asking for is ten righteous people? Now we find out in chapter 19, which we didn't hear this morning, but if you go home and you read chapter 17, 18, and 19 (three short chapters, five minutes, it's a fun story, there is no genealogy, there's no laws. Don't act Lutheran, go home read those three chapters) but in chapter 19 we find out that the

angels have gone down to Sodom. Abraham's nephew Lot takes in these angels to give them a place to stay, and to be hospitable and to protect them from whatever else might be going on. He thinks he is protecting them, but in actuality they end up protecting Lot and his family, because they are attacked and Lot and his family have to run for their lives. Things get really ugly there, his wife becomes very unattractive to slugs, there's fire and brimstone and there's a big grease stain there on the plain. But before that destruction happened, chapter 19 vs. 29, "God remembered Abraham." Abraham prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah. Prayed for the safety of others, unfortunately for them though, those for whom Abraham prayed were found lacking.

In a few minutes, we're going to join together in prayer. We're going to pray the prayers of the church. In a half hour, forty-five minutes or so we're going to be on our way home again or off shopping or visiting or where ever. So let me ask, when you leave here, when will you next pray? (And calling out God's name when that idiot cuts you off in traffic is *not* praying.) When will you next pray? Before bed? Before you sit down to eat a meal? Next Sunday when we gather together again? How often do you pray? For whom do you pray? Those are the questions that were asked. That's what Jesus strove to taught. Pray; pray often; pray for ourselves; pray for others. Pray.

Amen.