

Second Sunday in Lent
The Reverend John H. Brock

Saturday, February 27, 2010
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Luke 13:31-35

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

Tonight after worship, you are all invited to stay and take part in this wonderful meal that is going to be offered, as well as watching a really great movie "Up." Now I know that there are several of you who are here already for that, and that's great. If you didn't know that it's coming, I have been assured by Joe Hunter that if we all take good reasonable portions of food, there will be enough for everybody even if you didn't sign up.

The movie "Up" revolves around, let's call him a senior citizen, named Carl Fredricksen, and his desire to keep a promise. His cohort is a young boy, eight years old, named Russell. Russell is being raised by his single mom and he inadvertently gets caught up in Carl's attempt to fulfill this promise. Now it didn't occur to me until really just a little bit earlier today how much this movie ties in with our first lesson (and I won't share with you that I was sitting in the bathroom when I saw the poster for "Up," and it suddenly occurred to me, because that would be far too embarrassing for me to share).

So in Genesis, Abram has just finished rescuing his nephew Lot from some local warlords. That's in Chapter 14. He gets blessed by the King of Salem, a guy named Melchizedek, and Salem will eventually be called Jerusalem. After the safe return of Abram and Lot to their homes and Abram's allies to their homes as well, we get to our reading tonight from Chapter 15. We need to remember that way back in Chapter 12, the Lord God Almighty had issued a call to Abram in his native land of Ur: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (Genesis 12:1-2 NRSV) And that's all well and fine, but for the fact that at that point in the story, Abram is 75 years old. And so he might or might not be as old as Carl Fredricksen, we don't really know. All that really matters is that these guys are both, let's say, "well preserved."

By the time we meet up with Abram and Sarai in Chapter 15, they've been following this promise that God has given to them. They've been holding to the covenant that the Lord God Almighty gave them. They traveled several hundred miles from the land of Ur, which is near modern day Kuwait, if you think you have a mental picture of the Middle East. They traveled from modern day Kuwait to the land of Canaan, which is more or less modern day Israel. They're a few years more down the road here in Chapter 15 than when they first got the promise in Chapter 12. And Abram is thinking that his time has about run its course. He remembers the promise that God has given: I will make of you a great nation, but he's looking around and he doesn't see diapers anywhere. He's apparently chosen an heir from those who work for him, a fellow named Eliezer from Damascus, a little north of the

country that they are currently in. We guess that Eliezer isn't a bad guy since Abram chose him, but we don't know anything about him because this is the first and only time he ever shows up in the story of Abram and Sarai.

The Lord God, though, has different plans. "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." 'Ain't gonna happen that way,' God says, 'Come on, let's go outside.' God brings Abram outside and says, "Look toward heaven and count the stars if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be." This is the covenant. This is the *promise* that God gives to Abram and Sarai, who will later be renamed Abraham and Sarah. This covenant passes from them to their son, because they **do** have a son, Isaac; and it goes from Isaac to his son Jacob, who shall later be renamed, Israel. This is the promise that is given to the followers of the Lord God. This promise given to an old childless guy and his barren wife.

Carl Fredricksen has trust issues. So, too, apparently, does Abram. Carl's issues revolve around a loss that he *has* suffered and is *currently* suffering. Abram's issues are more around promises unfulfilled. 'God, you said we were going to have a kid, I don't see it, what's going on?' God steps in and gives Abram a theological dope slap. I have to say that I am a little bit jealous though of Abram and Sarai because they are given the blue light. They received the fax, they've gotten the email, they were given detailed instructions as to what was being promised. Well, okay, maybe not detailed instructions, but at least they got an outline. The Cliff Notes version. For most of us, though, it is usually simply just not that clear cut. When I thought God was calling me to seminary, or maybe I should better say when I quit running away from what I thought God was calling me to seminary, I didn't necessarily make a *deal* with God, but in my own my own mind, I got my thoughts wrapped around the idea that if I go to seminary, and if I do my best, if I try my hardest, if don't slack off like I have so many other times when I'm in school, if I do all that, and actually PASS, then I'm going to go forth with the understanding that being a pastor, being ordained, is indeed what God wants me to do, at least for the foreseeable future. **If**, however, I put forth all that effort and FAIL, then I will be pretty much convinced that I misunderstood the whole 'go to seminary' thing. I didn't get the 'go outside and look up at the sky and count the stars.' I didn't have the promise of a child, although we did have two children while we were in seminary.

So we, as 21st Century North Americans, how can we start to figure out what God IS calling us to do? Four words: Reflection; Renewal; Prayer, and; Penitence. Oh, wait, that's what Lent is about. Those are some of the ways that we are given to determine what it is that the Lord God is calling us to do. We're called to Listen, we're called to Seek, we're called to Confess, we're called to Forgiveness. Abram and Sarai heard eventually, even though they had been given such good clear cut directions, but it did take some repentance on their part, some time at prayer and reflection (We don't get that in our reading tonight, you got to go keep reading. I'm giving you a homework assignment, go home, keep reading in Genesis. Read the next several chapters and you get the whole story).

Carl Fredricksen has to learn repentance as well. He learns to reflect on his life and on his actions, and more importantly, he learns to trust (I really don't think that was a spoiler, it's a Disney movie). We, like Abram and Sarai; we, like Carl Fredricksen, are called to trust in the promise. The promise from God. We too are called to reflection, renewal, prayer, and penitence. And we too, like Abram and Sarai before us are part of that promise. We too, are part of those stars in heaven.

Amen.