



"God Bond: New Hope"

Second Sunday in Lent
Saturday & Sunday, February 24 - 25, 2018

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31;
Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

A teacher was in her final year and preparing for retirement and was reflecting on the 40-plus years of teaching and of all of the excuses she had heard over those 40-plus years. She decided to do something about it, so she gathered her students and she said to them, "I'd like you to take a piece of paper and I want you to write down all of the things that you can't do." And so, they wrote things down such as; "I can't spell," "I can't do mathematics," "I can't throw a baseball," "I can't like Jimmy Miller because he is obnoxious." She took the pieces of paper and stuck them in a shoe box and put a lid on it, and she had the children follow her out into the school yard where she had already dug a hole in the ground and she placed the box in the hole and then took a spade that she had laid out and began to put dirt over the box. And she said to the students, we're going to have a funeral for "I Can't" and she said this; *"Dear Friends, we are gathered here today to honor the memory of "I can't." While he was with us on earth he touched the lives of everyone, some more than others. Unfortunately, his name has been spoken in every public building, in schools and city halls, state capitals and yes, even the White House. And I have provided "I Can't" with a final resting place and a headstone that contains his epitaph. He is survived by his brothers and sisters "I Can", "I Will," and "I Am Going to Right Away." They're not as well known as their famous relative and are certainly not as strong and powerful yet, but someday with your help they will make an even bigger mark on the world. May "I Can't" rest in peace and may everyone present pick up their lives and move forward in his absence. Amen."*

The second half of the school year for the teacher was a delight, the children improved, whereas before they thought they couldn't do things, they had buried "I Can't." What was left open to them were all the possibilities and the hopes and the future. Imagine if the "I Can'ts" of your life were dead and buried. Imagine you can't live with "I Can't."

In our first reading it tells the story of Abraham and Sarah. They had been asked by God in the book of Genesis to move from their home city to a place that was really in the unknown, the unknown wilderness. And yet, they moved from that place to a new land. Abraham replaced "I Can't" with "I Will" and now in the story that we just read

they are old and past child bearing years and yet, they are offered a promise of new hope and once again Abraham replaces "I Can't" with "God Will."

The word that's used to describe God here "El Shaddai" (Heb.) literally means "God of the Mountains," but in English translations it's usually translated *God Almighty*. This is the first time that it's used in the book of Genesis, where it's used the most in the Bible. *El Shaddai* invokes the idea that God is able to do anything, to make anything possible. And in the case of Abraham and Sarah the barren will become fertile to fulfill God's promises. But Abraham and Sarah had no reason to hope, they were far from home, they were living in a barren land, they had no children and because of that no real family, no future, no legacy to pass on from generation to generation and yet God makes a covenant with them. He gives them a reason to hope. He gives a bond between God and Sarah and Abraham.

In this covenant you'll notice that God chooses normal people. Abraham and Sarah were not part of the elite of the city of Ur from which they came, they were not a part of the established political class, they were not rich, weren't famous. God chooses normal people to covenant with and the covenant is initiated by God. Abraham and Sarah don't ask for it, God freely provides it through his grace and love. And the hope that Abraham and Sarah have doesn't spring up from within themselves, it's not that they trust in themselves, they put their trust in God and his promises. They respond by living a life with their every step looking to God and every day being assured that God is with them.

This is nothing less than a life of faith, of "hoping against all hope," of believing. Believing, in the case of Abraham, that he would become the father of many nations because God said so. And in spite all of the difficulties that Abraham and Sarah faced in their life this blessing would lead to a generation of blessings. They would be blessed to bless others and even us.

Robert Fulghum, an author wrote, "*hope always triumphs over experience.*" This is the essence of the power of the cross for you and for me. Jesus' ministry, Jesus' only purpose was to give his life for the sake of the world. It's his experience, his life, death, and resurrection, that gives hope to the hopeless, comforts those who mourn, and gives freedom to those who are in bondage to sin and cannot free themselves.

His own disciples didn't understand this, and Peter confronts Jesus and says, "You Can't!" but Jesus **will**, he will give his life dying for the world and fulfilling the will of his Father in heaven. That is the power of faith. It's not just following the rules or doing what's expected, it's doing what goes beyond, living the life that is extravagant, extraordinary and significant. Martin Luther would say of faith that it "is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times." Jesus gave his life in a covenant of hope to you and to me. God has blessed this congregation and encourages us into greater faithfulness and service. He has inspired our members to give of their time and talents and treasures for the sake of Christ and his mission that we share. He invites us to **trust**, to trust God and each other, to **hope** in the promises of El Shaddai, Almighty God, and to **serve** caring for our neighbor and the world.

And brothers and sisters it's never too late to give your life to hope. Abraham and Sarah had to wait twenty-four years before the promise of children would come to fruition after God told them that his descendants would be like the stars in the sky. Sometimes waiting and hope are linked together, but we can trust *El Shaddai* to bring us new hope through the new covenant given by Jesus and his Cross, and we can sing; *Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus (ELW 802)* "full of faith and hope and love, let us do our Savior's bidding faithful Lord, with me abide; I shall follow where You guide." Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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