

Questions for God?
A Sermon by Mr. Tom Mason
Sunday, March 13, 2022

Genesis 15 :1-12,17-18; Philippians 3 :17-4 :1

As we move into this second Sunday of Lent, we find ourselves quietly reflecting on our relationship with God. This can be a time where God asks us questions? It is a season where we also may find ourselves asking questions of God?

Can a person who questions or doubts God also be a model for the faithful? What is the character of faithfulness? So often when we see people looking at the tough questions in life – when they feel the anxiety of doubt and uncertainty, when they struggle with frustration and disappointment, they think of it as a crisis of faith.

We are tempted to think of faith, only as unquestioning acceptance or of a silent submission, but as we follow Abram on his journey of faith, we can see Abram, faithful and obedient Abram, coming to a point where he has doubt and where he questions God's claims. Where he seems to have a disappointing hope despite all of Gods promises.

The Biblical picture of God and Abram's relationship is straightforward. God speaks; Abram listens; God promises; Abram believes. God commands: Abram obeys. Abram has been **Consecrated** by God. *"Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great"* (Gen 15:1) God has given Abram a special sacred purpose in his plan, Abram has been set aside, consecrated by God. Not only has God promised *"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great"* (Gen 12:2),

God has guided Abram onwards to a new land and promised him to be the father of a great nation. God has saved Abram from famine, God has rescued his nephew Lot from captivity, God has defeated his enemies in battle and despite lying to Pharaoh about his relationship with his wife Sarai, Abram has been further blessed and consecrated by the proclamation of the Priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek (Gen 14:9) *"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth"*

God has now brought them back to Canaan with silver, gold, and cattle. All is going well for Abram. Abram is the great model man of faithfulness. Even with all these assurances from God, and of the fulfilled promises from God, Abram experiences a **Disappointing Hope**. Abram asks a question to God: *"O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir to my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"* (Gen 15:2-3)

Abram needs and wants an heir. In ancient Hebrew tradition when an heir was not to be, a child would be adopted or born from a servant, and this child would be taken into the household and would become the heir and direct lineage of that family. Abram is an old man (History would show he was over one hundred years old), married to an old woman. Abram seems to say, how can it be that God will make me great and into a nation, without an heir to continue my name? I need to know more I have more questions for you God.

It is in this **Disappointing Hope**, that faithful Abram appears to doubt God. After all the blessings he has received, Abram shifts his thoughts and his focus from that of God, Abram places himself before God, to those things of men. He has been in the presence of God, consecrated for God's special purpose, he has experienced the "highs" of a strong personal faith relationship and a dependence on God, where God has fulfilled all his promises, now after ten years of waiting patiently, faithfully, nothing has happened. Abram's hope has been disappointed, with no child arriving. He seems to be doubting God's plan.

Abram wants to know how God is going to fulfill God's promises. God replies and answers Abram's question: *"And behold the word of the Lord came to him; "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."* (Gen 15:4) God reassures Abram that he and Sarai would have a child. **The Word of the Lord came to him.** God brought Abram back from doubt and he did this through *"The Word of the Lord."*

Holy scripture is our guide, *"All scripture is God breathed"* (2 Tim 3:16) It seems that the word of God not only instructs and directs us, but it highlights through human experiences the presence of God and righteousness under all conditions.

Scripture offers us a new lens for a new transformational perspective. A perspective where we can view our challenges and our difficulties with God. We are tempted to think of faith, only as an unquestioning acceptance or of a silent submission.

Abram challenges and questions God's claims. This kind of struggling with God, is part of faith. In response to Abrams questions and his complaints, God shows Abram, the constellations, "*Look towards heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them.*" (Gen 15:5); (Isa 40:25-31))

Has anyone here ever looked up at the clear night sky and been humbled by the majesty and depth of the unlimited and unknown number constellations? It makes you feel exceedingly small inside indeed.

God seems to take Abrams personal worry and concern of not having an heir, God expands them and magnifies them like a lens of a powerful camera, where God shows the unlimited scope and power of God, our Lord, and our Creator, where Abrams heirs will be too numerous to count. What seems unlikely or near impossible for humankind becomes possible with God. What is out of focus can be clear. It is now with this sense of clarity that Abram (Gen 15: 6) "*Believed the Lord; and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness.*"

Abram was prepared, despite his questions and his doubts and contrary factual evidence, to have confidence in Gods promise. Abram was going to **Persevere**, even when the outcomes seemed unlikely, Abram takes the next steps forward, in confidence, that Gods promise will determine the course and the direction of the outcomes for his life. It is this willingness to live life based on God's promise that the scripture describes as "*righteous.*" Abram still believes, but he still asks questions.

Immediately after God's judgement of Abrams faith as righteous (Gen 15:6), God declares: "*I am the Lord who brought you Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.*" (Gen 15:7) God is proving through his past actions, through God's faithfulness to Abram, that his promise is true. God has saved them and delivered them. Now it is up to Abram to persevere.

What does Abram do? He asks a question. "*How can I know that I am to possess it?*" (Gen 15:8) He asks God about the promised land.

Abram's faithfulness is questioning faithfulness. He is pleading with God for more, for more information, for more clarity, more courage, for more commitment.

No matter how faithful we become, we also plead with God, seeking an assurance and a sense of certainty, as we stumble along on our own journeys of life. We seek for more. Just like Abram, we seem to ask God, how will He accomplish things in our life that we seek, just how and when, will God give us what we think He has promised. Do we always remain resolved in our walk with God? (Gen 15:18) Do we become discouraged when the going gets tough?

Abram does not simply complain about what he thinks God should or should not provide, Abram is not feeling hard done by. Abram is questioning something more important. Abram is questioning God's activity in his life. His questioning faith takes seriously God's presence and power in his life.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians also understands the activity of God, but through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is consecrated, set a part in a similar, but not the same way as Abram. Paul writes this with a knowledge of his own imperfection in his faith and his life. "*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* (Phil 3:12) Paul presses on, he **Perseveres** with his walk in Christ. Paul also warns of the danger of not embracing God and accepting his activity in life (Phil 3:19-21).

Abram and Paul are both open to God's work in their own lives and faithfully believe that God can do something about it as they take the next steps of their faith journeys. Like Abram we also have questions and doubts that will not be silenced. We also can question God as part of that faithfulness and trust.

Lent offers us the opportunity to think about our own walk with God, as we live with the expectancy that God's promises of life, hope and future are extended to us in Jesus Christ, who was **Consecrated** by God who defines our faithfulness through His character in His own life and His death, and who even in the times of **Disappointing Hope**, encourages us to **Persevere** at all times and in all situations both on earth and in heaven (John 3:16).