

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Sermon: "Faith that talks back."

Scripture: Genesis 18:16-33, John 15:9-17

Rev. Steve Filyk

October 26, 2025

Opener: There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

Choruses: Amazing Love (You Are My King), How Deep the Father's Love for Us

After Prayers: Lord, listen to your children praying 449

Closer: To God be the Glory 350

Think for a moment about someone you're closest to —
your best friend, your spouse, a trusted coworker,
or maybe that neighbor who just 'gets you.'
What is the glue that keeps the relationship vibrant?

Maybe its the interests that you share...
Maybe you you are similar and maybe incredibly different...
Maybe there is respect and mutual admiration...
Maybe you feel safe to express some of your deepest concerns...

What is it about that relationship with your best friend
That makes this friendship so vital and important?

Now, shift that thought toward your relationship with God.
Can you imagine that kind of closeness —
laughter, honesty, even disagreement —
being part of your life with Him?

Some of you are probably recoiling at the idea
Of putting God in the same category as a friend.
It might be easier to compare your relationship with God
To that of an employer or an authority figure.

But did you hear what Isobel read from the Gospel of John?
Jesus said to his disciples: I no longer call you servants...
Instead, I have called you friend...
whatever you ask in my name the Father,
I will give you. (John 15:15-16).
PAUSE

Today we are continuing to explore the story of Abraham,
A man that Scripture remembers as a 'friend of God'. (James 2:23)

Last week our guest preacher explored
How God called Abraham and made a covenant with him.
God would bless Abraham so he could bless others.

This call and covenant
was an invitation into a friendship that Abraham accepted.
It all started when he was 75 years old.

Today his story continues, 25 years later.
Abraham receives some travellers as guests,
One of whom is revealed to be the Lord.
The Lord visits Abraham putting a timeline on a long-awaited promise.
The Lord tells Abraham that in less than a year
He and Sarah will be holding a newborn in their arms.

But the Lord hasn't just come to share new beginnings,
He is also there to speak of endings.

In what you can imagine as one of those thought bubbles
you see in cartoons or graphic novels,
The Lord considers whether to share with Abraham
His plan to judge the people of Sodom:

"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?
Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation,
and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.
For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children
and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord
by doing what is right and just,
so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."
(Genesis 18:17-19).

The Lord is really committed to Abraham,

and so the Lord lets Abraham know about his plans:
 “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great
 and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done
 is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”
 (Genesis 18:20).

For his part Abraham seems to know his neighborhood,
 And understand the reputation of Sodom.
 He knows that when God makes that visit
 God will find that things are just as bad as they have been reported.

But for of this knowledge, Abraham isn't itching
 To see his neighbors face judgement.
 He immediately starts to intercede on their behalf.

Abraham asks the Lord:
 “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?
 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city?
 Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place
 for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?
 Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked,
 treating the righteous and the wicked alike.
 Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”
 (Genesis 18:23-25)

Abraham knows about the depravity of his neighbors.
 In his time, he would have been very much accustomed
 To what we call collective punishment:
 Where the entire community is condemned for the actions
 Of some of its members.

In our world today, we still see tragic examples
 of entire communities suffering for the actions of a few.
 Whether in war or politics, innocent lives often swept up
 in the punishment intended for others.

Abraham argues that this collective punishment is unjust.

He argues that it is wrong for the righteous and the wicked
 to face the same condemnation.
 He urges the ‘Lord of all the earth’ to live by a higher standard.

Of course, we MIGHT think that higher standard
 Is for everyone to be accountable for their own action,
 That the righteous would save their own skins.
 This is where it gets interesting...

What Abraham questions is another possibility altogether.
 It is whether God will accept that “innocent people
 have the capacity to save others
 and the power to override the destructiveness of guilt.”
 (Walter Brueggemann Genesis 171, 172)

Abraham turns our normal sense of justice on its head.
 Instead of asking, ‘Shouldn't the guilty be punished?’ he dares to ask,
 ‘Could the righteous save the guilty?’

“What if there are fifty righteous people in the city?” Abraham asks.
 And in a surprising twist the Lord responds:
 “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom,
 I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

What follows is a negotiation
 where Abraham respectfully pleads for God to lower the number
 of righteous people required for God to spare the entire city.
 The number is whittled down to 10 righteous people.

But more significant than this is number
 Is the establishment of the principle
 that “that innocent people
 have the capacity to save others
 and the power to override the destructiveness of guilt.”
 (Walter Brueggemann Genesis 171, 172)

After this argument, the Lord leaves his friend Abraham

and Abraham returns to his home.

If you read the next chapter
You will discover the city of Sodom is as wicked as had been reported.
The city is not spared judgement as Abraham was hoping.
But Abraham's nephew Lot and some of his family
Were safely escorted away.

Does that mean that the Lord changed his mind
and simply separated the righteous and the wicked?

What Scripture tell us is that Lot and his daughters
were spared not because they were righteous,
But on the basis of the Lord's friendship with Abraham.

We are told that "when God destroyed the cities of the plain,
he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe
that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived." (Genesis 19:29)

This salvation of Lot, not based on his own righteousness,
Foretells a day when salvation will be offered to all
Based on the righteousness of Christ.

PAUSE

So what are we to take away from this story?
I think we are taught about the quality of relationship
God wants with each one of us.

Abraham, God's friend,
models a different sort of relationship with God
than most of us are able to fathom,
the sort of relationship with God
That Jesus invites us into.

We tend to relate to God as servants.

We don't ask questions.
We don't push perceived boundaries.
We are better stoics than Christians.

Abraham models a faith
that doesn't accept fate quietly but engages God boldly.
Abraham didn't seek peace through detachment but relationship.

"George MacDonald, the Scottish pastor and writer
who deeply influenced C.S. Lewis,
once wrote in his journals about wrestling with God
during his daughter's illness.

Though he felt angry and unheard,
he later reflected that even in his anger,
he found himself still talking to God —
and that this, too, was faith."
(Adapted from themes in MacDonald's *Diary of an Old Soul*
and Greville MacDonald's *George MacDonald and His Wife*, 1924.)

The very act of "talking back" is proof of intimacy.
Just think about your relationship with your best friend...

Friends fight.
Friends argue.
And the best friends
Are vulnerable with each other
Expressing their deepest hurts, their greatest concerns.

That's what friendship with God also looks like.
It's not polished prayers or perfect faith.
It's the honest conversation of love—the kind that keeps talking,
even when words come out as protest."

Let's live like friends who aren't afraid to talk back in love.
Amen.