

Sermon – Second Sunday After Pentecost (Proper 5A)

Scripture Texts: Genesis 12:1-9; Psalm 33:1-12; Romans 4:13-25; Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26
Sermon preached at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church

Focus Statement: *The journey of faith does at times call us to take big (and scary) steps to grow in love and health, the point is never to prove ourselves to God. God's love is unconditional, and God desires mercy, not sacrifice.*

Loving God: May my spoken words be faithful to your written Word, and lead us all to better know the living WORD, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Outline:

1. Justifying Ourselves
 - a. "But are you a *real* fan?"
 - i. Who here has seen Star Wars? Who enjoys the movies?
 - ii. Who are the real fans? Have any of you read the novels? Collected the toys? Stood in line for hours to see midnight premieres?
 - iii. There are different levels of fandom, and it seems like a natural human instinct to justify and distinguish ourselves as truly devoted to the movies or teams we love.
 - b. What are other areas where you have to justify yourself? *Sports, work (especially performance reviews), social clubs, ... sometimes even in the church?*
 - c. It can sometimes feel like we even have to justify our faith before God.
2. Abraham sets out on faith
 - a. Abraham is one of the most significant figures in the Judeo-Christian tradition
 - i. Genesis 12 is the transition from mythology to some form of history
 - ii. 🎵 "Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had father Abraham..." 🎵
 - b. Huge amount of faith shown by Abraham
 - i. Call of God comes to him in this passage
 - ii. Willingness to sacrifice – family connections, and connection to land and tradition, defined a person even more in that time than they do today. Leaving them was no small thing.
 - iii. Faith is more than intellectual assent – it is active! Abraham practices his faith in a very real way, and is honored for it (as we see in Romans)!
 - c. But, we should be honest that Abraham was also a hot mess.
 - i. He didn't have faith all figured out, but was "hoping against hope," as Paul puts it.
 - ii. Abraham repeatedly relies not upon God, but on lies and pretense and manipulation.
 - iii. He was called to be a blessing to all people, but that didn't keep him from owning slaves; moreover, his descendants used this blessing as a license to drive others out of the land God led them to – in ways that continue to cause problems today.
 - iv. Most especially, while Abraham and Sarah (his wife) were promised a child, they refused to wait and trust God. Rather, they exploited Sarah's handmaid, Hagar, impregnating her and claiming her child. If you've read or seen *A Handmaid's Tale*, it is based on these characters who are supposed to be exemplars of faith.

3. God desires mercy, not sacrifice.
 - a. Perhaps, then, Abraham is not meant to be a model for faith at its best as much as a depiction of the reality of faith. The reality is that people of faith make all sorts of mistakes and regularly struggle to trust God. In fact, the whole endeavor of faith would inevitably founder if it were up to us to justify ourselves.
 - b. Connect to the Gospel
 - i. Jesus' boundary crossing love is on display in this passage.
 - ii. Compare tax collectors to some ICE agents today – both are agents of imperial forces seeking to use intimidation and force to accrue power. But, rather than just denouncing the agents of imperialism, Jesus eats with them and calls them to receive grace and mercy.
 - iii. God calls us to mercy, and to hope, but not to sacrifice
 - c. Faith does sometimes call us to take bit and scary steps, but not to justify ourselves.
 - i. See the woman suffering from hemorrhages; her faith led her to daringly reach out to touch Jesus – so that she might be healed.
 - ii. During PRIDE, think of those who've had to leave home because they are rejected and condemned; they have gone forth trusting God to provide new community.
 - iii. The point is not to show ourselves worthy, but to take the steps toward health and love and mercy. Remember: the trauma we do not process and redeem almost always gets passed on.
 - d. As the Psalms express, the sacrifices we are called to make are sacrifices of thanksgiving. May we know ourselves as loved and accepted for who we are, and may we have the courage to step forward in faith, into the people God is calling us to be. May we recognize ourselves as blessed, and may all the world be blessed through us.

Amen.

Notes

- God desires mercy, not sacrifice
- This is the start of revelation of who God is through the particular people of Israel... Start of the Judeo-Christian story
- Significantly, the story begins with a call to pilgrimage... We must remember that a broken world is not our home – we look to the renewed and united heavens and earth.
- Faith is sometimes transgressive as we seem to be with the woman trying to take healing from Jesus that she doesn't think he would give
- Faith is active – a verb – as the woman reaches out to touch Jesus, and Abraham packs up everything to move
- Sacrifice is not demanded in order to prove ourselves to God, or to earn God's favor. However, sometimes God must call us to set out so that we might discover a new and better reality.
- Be careful about colonial readings, which emphasize God giving the land to Abraham, without regard for the people who are already there, or four different concepts of inhabiting and owning land
- God desires mercy – and the gospel shows us that mercy can be radical. The tax collector might be best understood as someone collaborating with the current administration by taking a sign-on bonus to work with ice.
- Mercy and not sacrifice: consider queer communities that have to be willing to leave home and believe that something better is possible