

## Moore Presbyterian Churches

March 5, 2023

*Second Sunday in Lent*



\*Indicates to please stand as you are able.

### **God calls us to worship:**

\*Call to worship:

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it;  
**for he has founded it on the seas,  
and established it on the rivers.**

Lift up your heads, O gates!  
**And be lifted up, O ancient doors!**  
that the King of glory may come in.

**Who is the King of glory?**  
The LORD, strong and mighty,  
the LORD, mighty in battle.

**Who is this King of glory?**  
The LORD of hosts,  
he is the King of glory. (Psalm 24)

### **We respond in praise and confession:**

\*Prayer of praise and supplication:

God of majesty and mercy,  
Christ, both Lord and Servant,  
Spirit of new life,  
Your mystery embraces the vast reaches of the universe  
and yet you are present with us in the course of our daily lives.  
With even the tiniest spark of your wisdom illuminated the greatest  
complexities.  
With the smallest gesture of your love, you renew our hope.  
Deepen our sense of your holy presence this day.  
Assure us that your love will never let us go.  
And so we offer our praise and our prayers this day to you,  
Holy God, Holy One and Holy Three,  
with humble hearts and faith that seeks understanding.

Prayer of confession (*Unison*):

**God of mystery and mercy,  
we confess that we prefer simply certainty to seeking for deeper  
understanding.**

**We settle for what we know, ignoring our doubts and questions.  
Forgive us when our faith falters because what we think no longer  
satisfies.**

**Open our eyes to the truth you hold out to us in Christ,  
and give us courage to rethink what we have assumed about you  
and your love for the world.**

We hear the gospel of God's grace:        John 3:14-17

\*Hymn:        #328 "This is my Father's world"

**God speaks to us:**

Scripture:    Genesis 4:1-4a  
                  Psalm 121 (read responsively)  
                  Romans 4:1-25

(The response to: "This is the word of the Lord" is, "**Thanks be to God**")

### Sharing the faith of Abraham

1. Last week we began the season of Lent by considering Sin and the holy habit of Confession of Sin. We considered that “confessing one’s sin” is more than simply cataloguing our various misdeeds and bad behaviours, although that may be involved. Rather, confessing one’s sin is the holy habit of *acknowledging* one’s complicity in the Power that is present in every human life that detracts from the holy, harmonious, and heavenly life on earth which our God says is “very good.”

We also considered that confession of sin is not meant as punishment nor to instil a sense of guilt or hopelessness; rather, being firm in the knowledge and belief that Jesus, through the cross, has already forgiven sin and removed the barriers that prevent our fellowship with our Creator, acknowledging our complicity in Sin helps prepare us to receive God’s grace. Such acknowledgment helps us recognize that without God, we merely add to the chaos; apart from God, we can do nothing. And so, *confession of sin, helps prepare us to receive God’s grace, or, in the words of Psalm 32, to receive “the steadfast love of the Lord [that] surrounds those who trust [the forgiveness wrought by Christ on the cross].”*

Today, the second Sunday of Lent, we’ll be considering faith.

Although it ought to be always within the focus of our hearts and minds, during the season of Lent we try to focus our inward eyes on the cross as we reflect on why Jesus came in the first place and why his crucifixion is necessary to God’s good purpose of redemption.

As I’ve already said, one consequence of His crucifixion, is that Sin is forgiven:

*For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.<sup>1</sup>*

As we saw last week.

However, God has given us human beings the ability to choose whether we will accept His grace or not.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:19.

As Paul wrote, just a few verses before what we read in Romans, we receive the blessed consequences of Christ's atoning sacrifice, when we exercise faith. In Romans 4:25, Paul wrote:

*...they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood **effective through faith.***

The historical event is that 2,000+ years ago, a man named Jesus from the town of Nazareth was crucified on a cross outside of the city of Jerusalem.

The history-changing consequence of that event, is that humankind no longer needs to be separated from our Creator, Sin is forgiven, the devil is defeated, death no longer looms over us as the Great Finale to be feared, and evil no longer has any claim to our thoughts, our emotions, or our actions.

All of this is made *effective* to our daily living and eternal hope *through faith*.

Paul wrote:

*For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the **righteousness of faith.***

And again:

*...the promise may ... be guaranteed to all his descendants ... who **share the faith of Abraham.***

A few summers ago, we looked at the story of Abraham in more detail. One of the important elements in his story is his repeated act of stopping in his travels to build an altar to the Lord. There are also a few instances in which Abraham didn't do this. And each time he failed to build an altar to the Lord, he monumentally messed up! One of the classic – and disturbing – examples, is when Abraham convinced his wife Sarah to pretend to be his sister so that, when they entered the next town, the men therein could pursue Sarah without first having to dispose of Abraham!

Building these altars was Abraham's version exercising his faith.

He had to regularly reaffirm for himself that God was real, good, and able to do what he had promised.

And, as he thus exercised his faith,

*he grew ever “stronger in his faith as he gave glory to God being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”<sup>2</sup>*

2. The Irish, Scottish, and Welsh monks of the early middle-ages (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> centuries) had a tradition of prayers that invoked the Triune God to surround and protect them throughout the day. A classic example would be something like:

I arise this morning  
in the strong name of the Trinity;  
God be with me against all trouble.  
Heavenly Father, Blessed Son, and Holy Spirit  
be above me,  
beneath me,  
before me,  
behind me,  
beside me.

These prayers, like Abraham’s altars, weren’t magical incantations that would force God to act and protect the monks. Rather, they served as affirmations to remind the monks of what God has already promised and enacted through the crucifixion of the Lord and Saviour Jesus, who was, is, and always will be the Messiah.

3. What God promised Abraham, he has fulfilled through Christ.

All the families of the earth will be saved by, with, and through the descendants of Abraham.

Jesus is *the* descendant of Abraham who, by his sacrifice, has paid the ransom and bought back our heavenly Father’s world, all that is in it, and those who live in it from Sin, death, and the devil!

Everyone who believes and trusts that God is real, good, and able; that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ; and that his sacrifice is the redeeming ransom for the world and all that is in it becomes, by God’s adoptive grace, children of Abraham, siblings of Christ, and joint heirs of the Promise.

*...whoever believes in Him would not perish, but may have eternal life.*

*...the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants ... who share the faith of Abraham.*

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 4:21

4. It is true that in our present age, as we sang a moment ago,  
...the wrong seems oft so strong,

As Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, whatever “wrong” may be occurring; whatever may be happening in our physical circumstance: be it illness, stresses in the home, communication frustrations, injustices, our struggle is primarily “not against enemies of blood and flesh, ... but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” This doesn’t negate our very real and very tangible struggles – or those of others; rather, it highlights that our ability to engage in our physical realities in a way that doesn’t add to the chaos but instead promotes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, depends on the health and stability of our own emotional and mental realities. Our actions depend on our thought patterns, which depend on our emotional responses to circumstances, which depend on what we believe about ourselves, others, and God.

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*...the promise rests on grace and is guaranteed ... to those who share the **faith** of Abraham.*

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By God’s grace working within us through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can face the wrong that seems oft so strong, without submitting to it, when *we* “grow strong in our faith as *we* give glory to God, being fully convinced that God is able to do what he has promised.”

God is the ruler yet.  
This is my Saviour’s world;  
the battle is not done;  
Jesus, who died, shall be satisfied,  
and earth and heaven be one.

So, how does one “share the faith of Abraham” in a way that makes Christ’s atoning sacrifice effective for our salvation – here-and-now as much as in the age that’s yet to come?

Well, one way as we saw last week, is by acknowledging our complicity in all that detracts from life and our submission to the Power within us known as Sin. In doing so we recognize and affirm that apart from God we can do nothing; apart from God, we simply carry on into the chaos until life becomes unbearable and unrecognizable.

Add to that, as we've already mentioned, is the holy habit of prayer coupled with scripture in which we affirm God's reality and goodness. Regular altar building in which we re-ignite our conviction that God is able to do what He has promised.

Add to that as well, we can consider the means of grace which God has given to sustain His church until Christ comes again. For Abraham and his descendants by blood, circumcision was the sacrament that reminded them of their communion with God, of their identity as His holy people, and that His covenant and His promise would be passed from one generation to the next. In Christ, we have been given a different sacrament: a meal to share with one another in His presence. We call it the sacrament of Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist. In this sacred meal we are reminded that we belong to God, and that by Christ's crucifixion that relationship is renewed.

There are many things we can *do*. There are many systems, mechanisms, habits, and practices that are supposed to help us grow strong in our faith. Especially during Lent, many people might adopt an ascetic practice and give up some luxury to try and grow strong in their faith. Alternatively, some people might adopt a new holy habit or take on a special project in Christ's name. But all of these actions, these works, these laws, are only effective in the degree to which we believe in our hearts and minds that God is able to do what He promises through them.

The faith of Abraham, while there are outward actions that accompany it, is an internal trust in our hearts and minds that Jesus Christ alone is the Saviour. That by his cross, he saves the world. And, coupled with that, it is embracing Christ as both Saviour *and* as Lord: trusting that his Word is actually effective for good.

**We respond by affirming our faith, offering our tithes, and prayer:**

Choir anthem (St. Andrew's): "We gather here"

\*Offering:

*(Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while congregation sings:)*

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
praise him all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heavenly host;  
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.**

Prayer of dedication:

The sacrament of Holy Communion:

Invitation

\*The Apostle's Creed

The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving (#564)

The Breaking of the Bread

Hymn: #209 "O Love that wilt not let me go"

The Communion

Prayer after Communion

**God sends us to serve and witness with God's blessing:**

\*Hymn: #204 "Thou didst leave thy throne"

Benediction:

Congregational Amen