

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, February 16, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: From Dead End to Deliverance – Time to Dream (VI)

I recently came across a humorous story titled “Strange and Unusual Events.” It’s about a man named Brian Heise, who had a “very irritating day.” He recounts the events of July 1982, and I would say he had more than his share of bad luck that month... When everything seems to go wrong, sometimes all we can do is laugh.

We’ve been in the sermon series “Time to Dream”. Today, we’re going to explore the final phase of faith: “From Dead End to Deliverance.” Our spiritual ancestor, Abraham, is a perfect example of this journey. At the age of 75, Abraham received a vision from the Lord, telling him that he would be a blessing to all people (Genesis 12:2-3). After receiving God’s dream, he decided to pursue it and moved forward into God’s promised land. But Abraham had to wait. For almost 25 years, he was in God’s delay, waiting for the answer. At the age of 99, Abraham and Sarah were about to give up on having a child due to their difficult circumstances. But then, amazingly the Lord gave them a son, Isaac. Sometime later, God gave Abraham the ultimate test. The Lord asked him to sacrifice Isaac as an offering on the mountain of Moriah. Even though Abraham felt like he was at a dead end, he kept believing in God and obeyed. That is when the angel of the Lord called out to Abraham and shared God’s message: “Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore... Through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me” (Genesis 22:13-18). God delivered Abraham from what seemed like a “nowhere to turn” situation and helped him accomplish his God-given vision. What a powerful example of turning an impossible dream into a reality! That was God’s miracle.

So, have any of us, or those we know, been in a dead-end situation? Or maybe today, we find ourselves facing similar obstacles on our faith journey. As we grow spiritually, we learn that there are things we cannot do on our own, no matter how hard we try. The things we cannot control, the things beyond our strength, are the ones we need to humbly ask the Lord to take care of for us. When we face challenges, we might ask ourselves the “Why Questions”: “Why did this happen to my loved one? Why am I going through this difficulty? Why does God seem silent on this issue in my life?” God understands our fragile faith. And even in those moments, He wants us, as Christ-followers, to continue placing our trust in Him and moving forward in the direction He has given us.

This morning, I want us to look at Abraham’s faithful response to God’s vision and apply those lessons to our spiritual adventure. When we reach a dead end—when we face a situation that seems impossible—we need to do four things.

First, we need to remember what God can do. In today’s Epistle, the Apostle Paul highlights Abraham’s incredible faith in “the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not” (Romans 4:17). Abraham’s dream from God was to become

“the father of many nations” (Romans 4:17). That vision seemed practically impossible, especially since he and his wife Sarah were advanced in age. Yet, despite their circumstances, Abraham remembered the Creator who gave life to every human being. He recognized the Way Maker, the God who creates something out of nothing. Instead of focusing on what he could not do, Abraham chose to focus on what the Mighty God could do. That was the starting point for him to experience God’s miraculous power on his faith journey.

Remembering what God can do is a crucial principle throughout the Bible. As God’s children, we are called to remember who has blessed us from the very beginning of our lives, through every season, and up to this point. Of course, we remember the Lord, our Shepherd, but also the love and support of our families and friends, and the strength God has given us to work hard and persevere. When we find ourselves at a spiritual roadblock, we need to remember what God has done in the past, what He is doing right now—even when we cannot perceive it fully—and what He will continue to do in the future. Remembering who God is and who we are in Him is so much more than just positive thinking. Please understand this: Optimism is good, and many optimistic ideas are rooted in Biblical truths. But remembering the Miracle Worker and the Promised Keeper, who holds the entire universe in His hands, expresses our faith in God. When we face things beyond our control, we need more than just a hopeful mindset. We need to remember what God can do for us and our loved ones.

Second, we need to rely on what God has said. Paul describes Abraham’s unwavering faith: “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’” (Romans 4:18). Despite the hopelessness of his situation, Abraham looked back at what God could do and held fast to what the Lord had declared. Since God gave Abraham the vision, he held on to the Word of God. In the face of his desperation, Abraham did not just trust in God—he trusted in God’s promises. Since walking with God, Abraham had received many of the Lord’s assured words. “I will make my covenant between me and you, and will greatly increase your numbers... I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you... I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:1-8). Notice the frequent phrase in these promises: “I will.” That is God’s vow to Abraham. Every time God says, “I will,” it is a reminder that He is determined to fulfill His promises.

Friends, what do we rely on in our faith journey? We can recall the encouraging words of our loved ones, the help and guidance they’ve offered us. We can remember the determination we’ve poured into pursuing our dreams, and the time, effort, and energy we’ve invested in those visions. But sometimes, we hear negative words from our spiritual enemy, Satan. He may whisper the word “never” to discourage us: “I’ll never see my dream come true. You’ll never get out of this difficult situation. The people you love and care for will never change. They’ll never become what God wants them to be.”

On the contrary, the Word of God is full of “I Will” promises. Do you know that Jesus used the phrase “I will” over 30 times in the New Testament? For example: “Come to me, all

you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people” (Matthew 4:19). “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age—I will be with you always” (Matthew 28:20). When we reflect on the presence of Jesus Christ, we can walk confidently, even through the darkest valleys. God wants us to turn to His promises and recite them when we are at a dead end. For example, Psalm 121:7-8 reminds us: “The Lord will keep you from all harm—He will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore.” In these times, we need our “dream book”—the Holy Scripture—more than ever. Despite the fear, uncertainty, frustration, weariness, and discouragement we may be feeling, we need to read God’s Word and rely on the promises the Lord has given us in our faith journey.

Third, we need to face the facts with faith. The Apostle Paul is amazed by Abraham’s steadfast faith in the midst of challenging circumstances. He writes, “Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised” (Romans 4:20). Abraham did not deny the impossible circumstances he and Sarah faced. To them, having a child was a “medical impossibility.” Yet, despite this unthinkable condition, Abraham did not tremble. Instead, he was strengthened by the Faithful Lord. Abraham did not fix his eyes on what was seen, but focused on what was unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Here, we learn an important aspect of faith. Pastor Rick Warren says, “Faith is not denying reality. Faith is facing the facts without being discouraged by them.” That is why, by faith, we can discover something hopeful beyond even the most unimaginable situation. Please hear me clearly: I’m not dismissing the challenges we face. We do feel hurt when we experience pain, and we do have struggles when life gets tough. But by faith, we can look up to God, who is greater than any challenge we are going through. Focusing on our problems can be called “worry,” but focusing on God’s promises is “meditation.” The difference lies in where we place our attention. When we focus on a bigger God, we begin to see obstacles through His eyes and face them with courage in our faith journey.

Fourth, we need to expect God to deliver us. Paul compares God’s justification of us to the fulfillment of Abraham’s God-given dream. Abraham became righteous before God because of his sincere faith. No matter the challenges Abraham faced, he kept trusting in God, who delivered him from many impossible situations. When Abraham offered his son Isaac, God provided a lamb as a substitute. The Lord rescued Abraham’s son from death and made him the father of many nations. Through God’s deliverance, Abraham accomplished his God-given vision and left a powerful legacy of faith. This truth about God’s deliverance from dead-ends is not just for Abraham—it is for us too. We believe in God who raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to the highest place (Philippians 2:9). By faith, Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross for all sinners, becoming the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. For three days, Jesus lay in a tomb, but at the end of those lifeless days, God rescued Him from death and helped Him complete His divine mission. Just like Abraham’s descendants, we, as Christ-followers, can experience God’s marvelous deliverance—from the dead-end to the eternal, life-filled place.

In our Gospel reading today, we see Mary and Martha coming to Jesus, hoping for deliverance from their darkest hour. They had just lost their brother Lazarus. Some of us can relate to their pain. Do we think our problems are beyond the reach of God? Life is tough. We face countless difficulties, but Jesus wants us to know that there is hope in every situation because He is the Resurrection and the Life. Before Jesus raised Lazarus, He spoke to Martha and Mary: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). Martha and Mary replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God..." (John 11:27). In the face of the unknown, they remembered what Jesus could do, relied on His Word, and expected His deliverance. Jesus was pleased with their faith and encouraged them further: "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). "The glory of God" would be shown in Lazarus being raised from the dead. The only condition for them to receive Jesus' promise was their response of faith: "If you believe..." Then Jesus prayed, thanked God for hearing His prayer, and called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43). And Lazarus was raised from the dead (John 11:44). What a powerful story of deliverance!

No matter what difficulties we face, Jesus wants us to know that there is hope in any situation because He is the Resurrection and the Life. Friends, what do you expect from the Lord today. The Risen Christ asks us the same question He asked Martha and Mary: "Do you believe that I can deliver you and your loved ones from the dead-end challenges you face?" Whatever spiritual obstacle we are encountering, or whatever "nowhere to turn" situation our loved ones may be in, the Lord, our Risen Savior, wants to deliver us from the dead-end. In the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, He is called the Savior. Christ has delivered us in the past, He is rescuing us in the present, and He will continue to save us in the future.

Today is a special Sunday for us as a church—a time to reflect on all that God has done in the past year and to look forward to what He will do in the months ahead. After this service, we will gather for our annual meeting, but before we do, I want to remind us of the theme of our church's New Year's sermon series: Time to Dream. What are our God-given dreams and visions? How have we, as Christ's Church, been doing with them so far? When the Spirit comes upon us, the young among us will see visions, and the young at heart will dream dreams (Acts 2:17). We will all witness our prayers for our loved ones, our church, and our community being answered in the days ahead. During this spiritual adventure, let us confess our love for the Lord, our Strength, and keep believing in the Way Maker, the Promised Keeper, and the Miracle Worker. Let us ask our Mighty Deliver and Merciful Saviour to save us from danger and deliver us from the dead-end, bringing us to God's Promised Place—our ultimate home in Heaven! (Psalm 18:1-3). Amen!

**In preparing this sermon, I've been inspired by various sermons series, including Rick Warren's teachings on God's Dream and David Jeremiah's book, Forward, drawing from texts like Genesis 17:1-8; Romans 4:16-25; John 11:17-27, 38-44.*