

**Mark 8:31-38**  
**Romans 4:13-25**

**First Presbyterian Church of Delanco, NJ**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent, March 8, 2009**

### **Keepin' Our Faith**

Paul's Letter to the Romans is a little different from his other letters. Paul did not start the church in Rome as he did churches in other places. Since no one seems to know who started this church, Paul wants to be sure the members are on the right track. He wants them to know and understand the elements and history of the gospel of Jesus Christ correctly. So Paul's Letter to the Romans is essentially his detailed statement of faith. It is not only what he believes, but why he believes it.

Paul compares his faith to the faith of early Jewish forefathers from the Old Testament. In Romans 4, Paul talks about the solid and unwavering faith of Abraham and Sarah. Even though they are childless until Abraham is 99 and Sarah is 90, God promises they are to be the parents of many nations. Today we link Abraham to being an ancestor of Jesus Christ. But Abraham and Sarah are not thinking that far into the future. They simply count on and have faith in God to give them a son, despite their old age. They continue to believe and have faith because they know God always keeps His promises. Abraham and Sarah love and obey God. God loves them and fulfills His promise, but in His own time.

With everything hinging on faith, it is no surprise that Paul uses the faith of Abraham as an example. It is important to know in whom we base our faith. Abraham's faith is clearly related to what he knows and believes about God. Abraham knows two things about the God he trusts. God is the One who breathes life into deadness, and who speaks creative words to bring things

into existence. The magnitude of these concepts of God seem so large. But they should not be overlooked since it is possible many believe in a God who seems far removed from the God we read about in Scripture.

People around Abraham seem to believe in something, probably as fervently as Abraham believes in his awesome God. Their experience is limited because of the limitation of their faith in what they believe. There are times their belief seems to be nothing more than empty superstitions. Intelligent faith seems to know exactly what it believes. Abraham has no basis for believing he can, in his old age, become the father of many nations, other than his faith in God's promise to him. It seems to be a hopeless situation. Nevertheless, Paul reminds us, Abraham believes. He has faith which is rooted in God and His word. Therefore his faith is full of confidence instead of having a touch of desperation as others have. Abraham's faith is thoroughly grounded in and based on God.

Paul explains strong faith triumphs over difficulties. Abraham is able to wrestle with the deadness of his own body because he believes in God who gives life to the dead. Abraham shows that faith links the knowledge of God with overcoming difficulties.

Paul describes Abraham's faith as being consistent. Some people, when faced with delay and discouragement, may have doubts about their faith, while others find strength in delay. When Abraham considers his circumstances on the one hand, he may have been tempted to sink into despair. Yet when he considers the promise of God, he feels immeasurable joy. Abraham patiently trusts God to work through endless delays and

disappointments. In this way, Abraham quietly gives glory to God. The more opportunities Abraham is given to praise God in faith and be reminded of God's promise, the more he is led into a stronger trust and faith in God.

Paul makes three important affirmations about God. First, God is the One who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things which do not exist. From every perspective, the barrenness of Abraham and Sarah seems to make fun of the promise of God about their having a long and rich line of descendants. Nothing in the circumstances of these two senior citizens guarantees their giving birth to a great nation, except the presence of God who works miracles. In reality, the history of God's relationship with Israel can be described as one long series of miracle stories. Time after time God creates something out of nothing.

Paul's second affirmation about God is God does what God promises. Our all-powerful God is not turned into a superhero who redirects speeding bullets and guarantees all our crises will have happy endings. For Abraham and Sarah, believing in what God promises is placing their trust in God.

Paul's third affirmation about God names God as the One who raises Jesus our Lord from the dead. God the Creator and God the promise-keeper find their fullest expression in God the Redeemer. The One in whom Abraham and Paul trust and have faith brings forgiveness of sins, fulfills promises, and sets things right.

Paul wants us to see Abraham as a model of solid faith. If we are wavering in faith, as Abraham does at times, then our faith will also be reckoned as

righteousness. The mention of what God does in Christ lifts the story above simple excitement in the words we read and hear. God is worthy of human trust which is shown convincingly in the tremendous display of grace in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul's statement concerning the death and Resurrection of Christ shows it is not the death of Christ alone which provides the basis for our faith. It is through Christ's Resurrection He is shown to be the Son of God with power and the divine answer to human problems.

In Romans 4, Paul reminds us to examine the way in which true faith reflects and feeds on God. Abraham's faith is focused on the true God at every turn. Our faith looks fully at the human and world situation, filled with decay and death, recognizes the troubled times in which we live, and looks firmly at our God to create something from nothing. Worshiping our God and acknowledging that He has the power to fulfill promises of new life in place of death is fundamental to Christian faith.

Faith and promises are essential in this passage. The main subjects for Paul and us are Abraham, his family, and his God. Paul writes about them to explain the covenant of God and the way in which the covenant promises are fulfilled through faith.

Because Abraham worships, trusts, believes, and has faith in the true God, he is given power to be fruitful and to obtain the promised inheritance. Paul indicates the whole idea is the focusing of our lives on God, honoring God, and having faith in Him. This is the basis of our faith.

We have examples of strong faith all around us. One example is in Beverly. St. Stephen's Episcopal Church has put their faith in action. I read in a recent issue of the Burlington County Times that they have received another grant to repair structural damage in the steeple and supporting tower of their historic church. They have worked and waited patiently for several years to receive money to bring new life to their crumbling, dead building. I sincerely doubt they would have received these grants without trusting in the Lord and having strong faith.

We all know people who have struggled and are struggling with illnesses, financial difficulties, and other obstacles. Each of these people has found that strong faith helps them to overcome their problems and makes their faith stronger. Faith does not cure, God does. But faith gives us hope and trust in God when we follow the examples of Abraham and Paul.

Like Abraham, our faith grows strong as we glorify God, as we seek to live in the relationship which God establishes with us through Christ Jesus, our Lord. When we live our lives in God's glory, our awesome God will do great things in our lives.

In this Lenten season and always, may we each become more aware of focusing our lives on God, on worshiping and honoring Him, and strengthening our faith by relying on God alone. In these ways, we can enjoy entering into a closer, more loving, and more faithful relationship with our Lord for the rest of our earthly lives and in eternal life. Amen.