**Sermon:  “Faith and The Cross”**

**Scripture:  Genesis 17 (Dusty Rhoads); Romans 4: 13-25 (Dusty);**

**Mark 8: 31-38**

**Genesis 17 (Good News Translation)**

**Circumcision, the Sign of the Covenant**

**17** When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am the Almighty God. Obey me and always do what is right. **2** I will make my covenant with you and give you many descendants.” **3** Abram bowed down with his face touching the ground, and God said, **4** “I make this covenant with you: I promise that you will be the ancestor of many nations. **5** Your name will no longer be Abram, but Abraham, because I am making you the ancestor of many nations. **6** I will give you many descendants, and some of them will be kings. You will have so many descendants that they will become nations.

**7** “I will keep my promise to you and to your descendants in future generations as an everlasting covenant. I will be your God and the God of your descendants. **8** I will give to you and to your descendants this land in which you are now a foreigner. The whole land of Canaan will belong to your descendants forever, and I will be their God.”

**9** God said to Abraham, “You also must agree to keep the covenant with me, both you and your descendants in future generations. **10** You and your descendants must all agree to circumcise every male among you. **11-12** From now on you must circumcise every baby boy when he is eight days old, including slaves born in your homes and slaves bought from foreigners. This will show that there is a covenant between you and me. **13** Each one must be circumcised, and this will be a physical sign to show that my covenant with you is everlasting. **14** Any male who has not been circumcised will no longer be considered one of my people, because he has not kept the covenant with me.”

**15** God said to Abraham, “You must no longer call your wife Sarai; from now on her name is Sarah. **16** I will bless her, and I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will become the mother of nations, and there will be kings among her descendants.”

**17** Abraham bowed down with his face touching the ground, but he began to laugh when he thought, “Can a man have a child when he is a hundred years old? Can Sarah have a child at ninety?” **18** He asked God, “Why not let Ishmael be my heir?”

**19** But God said, “No. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son and you will name him Isaac. I will keep my covenant with him and with his descendants forever. It is an everlasting covenant. **20** I have heard your request about Ishmael, so I will bless him and give him many children and many descendants. He will be the father of twelve princes, and I will make a great nation of his descendants. **21** But I will keep my covenant with your son Isaac, who will be born to Sarah about this time next year.” **22** When God finished speaking to Abraham, he left him.

**23** On that same day Abraham obeyed God and circumcised his son Ishmael and all the other males in his household, including the slaves born in his home and those he had bought. **24** Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, **25**and his son Ishmael was thirteen. **26** They were both circumcised on the same day, **27** together with all of Abraham's slaves.

**Commentary:**

Genesis 17 describes the initiation of circumcision as a sign of the special covenant relationship between God and Israel.  It is an earthy, delicate, and intimate symbol consummating the relationship between God and the people. From ancient times (around 2000 years before Christ) circumcision has been the clear sign that this person/these people are Jewish and they belong to God.  The seriousness and eternal nature of this covenant are clearly delineated in chapter 17.  This makes it all the more earthshaking when Paul argues that faith has supplanted all law and that baptism is the sign of the new covenant that has replaced the outward symbol of the old. (Colossians 2:  11-15)

Question 74 in the Heidelberg Catechism asks,

Q. Should infants, too, be baptized?

A. Yes. For they as well as adults belong to God’s covenant and community ([Gen. 17:7](https://www.esv.org/verses/Gen.%2017%3A7/)) and no less than adults are promised forgiveness of sin through Christ’s blood ([Matt. 19:14](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2019%3A14/)) and the Holy Spirit, who produces faith ([Ps. 22:10](https://www.esv.org/verses/Ps.%2022%3A10/); Is. 44:1–3; [Luke 1:15](https://www.esv.org/verses/Luke%201%3A15/); [Acts 2:39; 16:31](https://www.esv.org/verses/Acts%202%3A39%3B%2016%3A31/)).

Therefore, they, too, ought to be incorporated into the Christian church by baptism, the sign of the covenant, and distinguished from the children of unbelievers *(*[*Acts 10:47*](https://www.esv.org/verses/Acts%2010%3A47/)*;*[*1 Cor. 7:14*](https://www.esv.org/verses/1%20Cor.%207%3A14/)*). This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision (*[*Gen. 17:9–14*](https://www.esv.org/verses/Gen.%2017%3A9%E2%80%9314/)*), in whose place baptism was instituted in the New Testament (*[*Col. 2:11–13*](https://www.esv.org/verses/Col.%202%3A11%E2%80%9313/)*).*

Just believe, trust Christ’s faith and be baptized!

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**Romans 4: 13-25 (GNT)**

**God's Promise Is Received through Faith**

**13** When God promised Abraham and his descendants that the world would belong to him, he did so, not because Abraham obeyed the Law, but because he believed and was accepted as righteous by God. **14** For if what God promises is to be given to those who obey the Law, then faith means nothing and God's promise is worthless. **15** The Law brings down God's anger; but where there is no law, there is no disobeying of the law.

**16** And so the promise was based on faith, in order that the promise should be guaranteed as God's free gift to all of Abraham's descendants—not just to those who obey the Law, but also to those who believe as Abraham did. For Abraham is the spiritual father of us all; **17** as the scripture says, “I have made you father of many nations.” So the promise is good in the sight of God, in whom Abraham believed—the God who brings the dead to life and whose command brings into being what did not exist. **18** Abraham believed and hoped, even when there was no reason for hoping, and so became “the father of many nations.” Just as the scripture says, “Your descendants will be as many as the stars.” **19** He was then almost one hundred years old; but his faith did not weaken when he thought of his body, which was already practically dead, or of the fact that Sarah could not have children. **20** His faith did not leave him, and he did not doubt God's promise; his faith filled him with power, and he gave praise to God. **21** He was absolutely sure that God would be able to do what he had promised. **22** That is why Abraham, through faith, “was accepted as righteous by God.” **23** The words “he was accepted as righteous” were not written for him alone. **24** They were written also for us who are to be accepted as righteous, who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from death. **25** Because of our sins he was given over to die, and he was raised to life in order to put us right with God.

**Commentary:**

St. Paul dives into some deep theology here as he explains the faith of Abraham and how we, too, are justified by that same faith.  In fact the Bible itself states that some of the Apostle’s words are difficult to understand!  See what St. Peter says in verse 16 below about the depth of Paul’s wisdom:

**2 Peter 3: 11-13** Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow, do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the Day of God, eager for its arrival. The galaxies will burn up and the elements melt down that day—but we’ll hardly notice. We’ll be looking the other way, ready for the promised new heavens and the promised new earth, all landscaped with righteousness.

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**14-16** So, my dear friends, since this is what you have to look forward to, do your very best to be found living at your best, in purity and peace. Interpret our Master’s patient restraint for what it is: salvation. Our good brother Paul, who was given much wisdom in these matters, refers to this in all his letters, and has written you essentially the same thing. ***Some things Paul writes are difficult to understand.*** Irresponsible people who don’t know what they are talking about twist them every which way. They do it to the rest of the Scriptures, too, destroying themselves as they do it.

**17-18** But you, friends, are well-warned. Be on guard lest you lose your footing and get swept off your feet by these lawless and loose-talking teachers. Grow in grace and understanding of our Master and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Glory to the Master, now and forever! Yes!  *(—The Message)*

Yet, this is one of the most blessed and inspired messages we have from Paul—“we are saved by faith alone, not by works of the law.”  It is the main foundation of the whole Protestant Reformation of the Church.

So we have the *faith* of father Abraham, and the *faith* of Jesus Christ to carry us through to the end (not to mention Mother Mary, Sarah, Ruth, Elizabeth, Hannah, and Mary Magdalene) *faith*, which is always good because it is given by God.

Have faith, believe, trust and obey—and the great promise is that salvation is yours.  Just believe, just believe,…”this is eternal life, that you believe in Jesus Christ and God who raised Him from the dead.”

What more is there?

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**Mark 8: 31-38 (GNT) Jesus Speaks about His Suffering and  Death**

**31** Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will rise to life.” **32** He made this very clear to them. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. **33** But Jesus turned around, looked at his disciples, and rebuked Peter. “Get away from me, Satan,” he said. “Your thoughts don't come from God but from human nature!”

**34** Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him. “If any of you want to come with me,” he told them, “you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me. **35** For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you will save it. **36** Do you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! **37** There is nothing you can give to regain your life. **38** If you are ashamed of me and of my teaching in this godless and wicked day, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**Commentary:**

The perennial theme of Lent is the teaching of Jesus that His followers must take up our cross an follow Him!  What kind of teaching is this?  And how did it survive for 2000 years?  What truth does it carry that disciples are willing to follow “even unto death?”  We have heard the ancient saying:  “We all have our cross to bear.”

Perhaps it is the reality that life, every human life, has its challenges, hardships, and difficulties.  Everyone suffers at some time and everyone dies.  Therefore, there is no absolute option to avoid these things and death is part of life.

The point then becomes how shall one live and how shall one die.  Jesus invites us to journey with Him.  He will be our companion during this earthly pilgrimage.  Jesus will teach the way of life eternal even through death itself!  As the Apostle Paul teaches, if we give ourselves completely to Christ and live in Jesus, die in Jesus, we shall also be raised with Jesus!  Now that’s a faith and that’s a Messiah, worth living for,…worth dying for!

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6:5)

Amen.