

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 12:1-4; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5,13-17; John 3:1-17

There is a line from the movie *Forrest Gump*, where Forrest says: *“My momma always said, ‘Life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get’*”. Forrest is summing up his life as he reflects on all the twists and turns that his life has taken.

We never know what is around the next bend in our life’s journey, but it’s more than good or bad luck if we survive the ride or not. It’s more than relying on our own strength to endure. When we reflect on the path life has taken, none of us would have guessed in our early years, some of the unexpected twists and turns; the times of despair that seemed unending and the moments of complete joy that we wished would never end.

We might even wonder if things would have turned out differently if we had made different choices.

Abraham’s life was a bit like that. He was very settled and had done very well for himself in Haran. Then out of the blue, God came to Abraham and told him to pack up everything and move.

Abraham could have said, “No thank you, God. I’m quite happy where I am”.

Did Abraham expect that at 75 he would have to take this journey of a lifetime? Did Abraham know where he was going?

Could Abraham be certain of what the future may bring? Did he know that he would remain a wanderer for the rest of his life, and that the only piece of land that he would own would be a

burial plot for his wife?

He knew none of this, just as none of us know what will happen in our life's journey beyond this moment. Just like any of us, Abraham made some big blunders along the way. He made some bad choices and sometimes questioned what was really going to happen next.

What enabled Abraham to be so positive when the road he was taking took some very unusual turns, like leaving Haran, being promised to be the founder of a great nation, and yet not have any children, and then when he finally has a son in his old age, he is commanded to sacrifice him on Mt Moriah? Simply put - faith.

“It was faith that made Abraham obey God”. What is meant by *faith*?

There are a lot of misunderstandings about what it means to live by faith in God. Faith in God does not mean that bad things will never happen in our life, and that bad things have come our way because we haven't trusted God enough. It does not mean that God will instantly give us healing, or rescue and save us from accidents and illness. It is not because of a lack of faith, when someone suffers from cancer, depression or some other serious illness. Living by faith in God doesn't mean that we will never experience a shaky marriage, always have a good job, our kids will never disappoint us and always follow God's ways. Living by faith in God doesn't mean that we will be successful and wealthy. It doesn't mean that when we hit a low point in our life, it's because we have a lack of faith in God. Having faith in God doesn't mean that we will never be overwhelmed by a natural disaster, suffer at the hands of enemies, get caught in the crossfire of a war, or lose our life because of our faith.

This kind of misunderstanding about faith heaps added burdens and stress on those who are suffering. They blame themselves for “lack of faith”.

So what does the Bible mean when it says, “*It was faith that made Abraham obey when God called him to go out to a country which God had promised to give him*”. Faith was putting himself into the hands of God, willing to go on a journey into the unknown, trusting that wherever God would lead him, he would be there to help him. Abraham’s faith trusted God to help him through any anxiety or uncertainty. Even though he trusted God, he still faced all kinds of difficulties. His troubles didn’t magically disappear, he still made mistakes. At times his faith seemed extremely fragile. The promise that he would be the beginning of a great nation seemed like a ridiculous dream. At times he doubted and misread the signs of what God’s plan for his life was. But he kept on the journey, trusting the God who had spoken to him, and given him a promise and his reassurance. In faith he believed that God would not let him down. He believed that God’s wisdom was far greater than his and finally reached his new home.

In the Gospels, the disciples faith started as they journeyed with Jesus. Sometimes they were sure of their faith, but at other times they were uncertain where they were heading. It was wonderful travelling with Jesus, but sometimes it was dangerous. One thing was clear, as they journeyed with Jesus, their faith was shaped and strengthened and affirmed.

None of them were saved from misunderstanding, abuse and suffering. They did not become popular and prosperous. In time they had to face situations worse than they could imagine, and confront powerful people and forces that once would have filled them with dread. But as they journeyed on in faith, they

found the strength and wisdom necessary for each challenge and each trial. As they travelled, they discovered that although good times came, and they enjoyed those good moments, their faith actually grew larger and stronger when storms roared into their faces. Paul endured all kinds of hardships, persecutions, sickness, as an apostle for Christ, but in the end he praised God for his hardships.

Faith hasn't changed. It is going on a journey with Christ Jesus, not knowing where it will lead us, but sure that things will work together for good. There will be those times when our faith will seem to waver; when we can't see where the road ahead is leading us; when all we can focus on is the pain and grief, and not see the giant arms of Jesus embracing us and holding us up. It is by stepping out with what little, yet precious faith that we do possess, that we will find the greater faith for which we all long.

Like Abraham, we don't know where the road ahead will lead, and what detours and crossroads we will encounter, but we will say, when we reach our final destination in heaven, "The trip sure was a bit scary at times, but with faith in Jesus, we have made it, and it was well worth it".

AMEN.