

During this season of Lent, we are exploring in worship different gifts that the Scriptures bring to our attention. Last week, a few of us gathered here on a day the snow and ice covered our roads to explore the gift of opportunity. Today the text leads us into exploring the gift of family.

Now I say the gift of family because all of us know that there are many times we do not see our families as a gift. Teenagers here today know there are many times they do not see their parents as a gift. I know in our household of teenagers the rolling of the eyes is a common every day event.

When we become older and depend on adult children to care for us the decisions that have to be made and the conflicts that arise certainly make it seem as though those times are not a gift. Baby boomer adults caring for and making decisions for greatest generation parents puts a strain on any family relationship.

Young children who get sick at inopportune times, sisters or brothers who embarrass you, weird Uncle Frank whom you see at family reunions but who is so very different from you may all be occasions when family members seem to be anything but a gift.

Some of us here have moved far away from family and have settled in a new land so the extended family may not be that big of a deal now. Others of us here feel like we are related to people all over York County and we are constantly compared to some family member.

Recognizing that family members can be anything but a gift at times, let us turn to the Scripture which we are going to be reading from the Old Testament book of Genesis.

Prior to our reading, God says to a man named Abram whose name later will be changed to Abraham that he is “to go from his country and his kin people and his parent’s house to the land that God will show him.” God promises Abraham that God will make a great nation from Abraham’s descendants.

So at 75 years of age, Abraham, along with his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot, departs his land and his kin folk and sets forth to go to the land of Canaan. God promises Abraham that Canaan will be the place where his family will settle and prosper. We learn that Abraham is a very rich man with lots of livestock, silver, and gold.

Now along the way to a place called Bethel, yes, the area name Bethel around here comes from the Bible, Abraham and his nephew Lot began to quarrel with one another. They determine that it’s best if they don’t continue together. So Abraham and Lot divide up territory. But then Lot gets captured by an invading king and Abraham comes to his rescue.

Now we move into the 15th chapter of Genesis and our reading for today.

Read Genesis 15.

Some New Testament writers and many Jews and Christians today look to Abraham as a model of faith. And we assume that Abraham’s relationship with God is pretty straightforward. God speaks and Abraham listens. God promises and Abraham believes. God commands and Abraham obeys. But in our text today there comes a point when Abraham says, “Uh, wait a minute God. I have a question. How are you going to fulfill your promise?”

Earlier, God had promised Abraham that he would be the father to many. He was promised by God that his descendants would make up a great nation. But now Abraham and his wife Sarah are closing in on 90 and they have no children. “Uh, God, how are you going to fulfill this promise? Abraham looks at his life and says, ‘God, it is unclear how you are going to work this out. There are some major obstacles in the way. Can you provide me with a little more information?’”

God then directs Abraham to look up into the stars and tells Abraham that his descendants will be greater than all of these stars. The text does not say that this removes Abraham’s doubts. I am sure he still had many. There is no way for Abraham to understand how God was going to fulfill God’s promises to his family.

Abraham asks specific questions but does not get specific answers. But even with these lingering doubts, Abraham believes in God’s providence for his life. Abraham trusts that when God says that God will take care of his family, Abraham trusts that God will do what God promises.

But this trust does not remove Abraham’s questions. Abraham continues to ask God how God is going to accomplish what God is promising. Abraham trusts but Abraham continues to ask questions about how God is going to take care of his family and provide his family with what his family needs to survive and thrive.

Some of us may have come into worship today with questions about our family. Will God provide our family with what we need? Will God provide for our children? Will God provide for our aging parents? Will my adult children care for me as I age? Will God provide a faithful companion to me? Will God provide our family with what we need to grow in faith?

Some of us may have come into worship with some worries and concerns about our family. We may be worried about a child and the decisions they are making or about to make. We may be worried about decisions we are facing that are related to some type of family issue before us. We may be concerned that we will never find that loving mate or that we are concerned about a current relationship.

Some of us come into worship celebrating that we are a part of a great family. Others of us may have come into worship embarrassed by our latest family incident. Some of us may have questions about why we feel so blessed while others of us may come into worship wondering why our family is so bad off.

God promised Abraham that God would take care of Abraham and Abraham's family. That did not mean that there would not be hardship. In fact, in our text today, God reveals to Abraham that there will be a time when his family will be aliens in a foreign land. They will be made slaves in this foreign land and will suffer hardship for 400 years.

But even though there would be hardship, God promises Abraham that God will be faithful to his family and see them through the rough times because there is something bigger that God is about.

God's promise to Abraham is also a promise to us. A promise that God will care for our family. Like Abraham's family, our family may face some pretty tough times as well. And during those difficult days, we can be like Abraham and ask lots of questions seeking to understand what God is doing in the midst of those difficult times.

There may be lots of unanswered questions in terms of our family. But even with unanswered questions, we can still place our faith that God will provide and care for our family. Our responsibility is to trust God even if we don't see how God can do it.

As part of the prayers of the people this morning, you will be invited to share any family stories. Stories of family members that have been important to you and why. But you are also invited to share any pain that a family member may have caused you if that is where you are this morning. Good or bad, they are our families and they have shaped us.

Even with questions about what happens next in our families, we are invited to trust God. Even though being a part of a family can drive us nuts sometimes, families are a gift from God. AMEN.

-*Feasting on the Word* commentary, Year C, Volume 2 provided some general outline for this sermon.

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