

February 28, 2021

Second Sunday in Lent
Defeating Self-Doubt
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Opening words: According to the Revised Common Lectionary, today is the Second Sunday in Lent. Our primary reading for today comes from the first book in the Bible, Genesis. Tradition tells us it was written by the great law giver, Moses. He wrote it to the Israelites between 1446 and 1406 BC. They understood Genesis to be their family story. The name of the book discloses the purpose of the book. Genesis means "origin" or "beginning." Genesis can be broken down into two main sections. The first eleven chapters deal with prehistorical history. That section gives us the creation story, the story of Adam and Eve, the great flood, the tower of Babel, and the rest. Each one explains the origin of various things in our universe. The second section, beginning at chapter twelve, tells us about patriarchal history. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. It is safe to say the family tree had flaws. We can relate to the flaws, but those flaws did not frustrate God's divine plan. It is in that second section we find ourselves today. Our reading for today is Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16. Let me call this message *Defeating Self-Doubt*.

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. **2** Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." **3** Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, **4** "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. **5** No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. **6** I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. **7** I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

15 God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. **16** I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

Let me begin and end with stories about two bearded presidents. The twenty-third President of the United States was Benjamin Harrison (1833-1901). He was a Republican from Indiana. He served as president from 1889-1893. It was during his term the White House was wired for electricity. The White House was wired for electricity in 1891. Electricity had only been around about ten years. Many were still skeptical. Harrison was one. He must have wished it would have waited for his successor, Grover Cleveland (1837-1908). Historians tells us Harrison was intimidated by electricity. He and his wife, Caroline (1832-1892), refused to touch a single light

switch. They were afraid of being electrocuted. They were so paralyzed by fear the Harrisons often slept with the lights on if no servants were present to turn them off. I tell you that story for one reason. Our fears and self-doubts have a way of paralyzing us. It is a common fact today. If you agree fears and self-doubts can be paralyzing, say, "**Amen!**" That takes us to today's scripture lesson.

We find ourselves in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis. Abram is ninety-nine years old. (I do not play the numbers game. If the Bible says he was ninety-nine, then he was ninety-nine.) His covenant with God was yesterday's news. It had been twenty-four years since God made the great promise to make his descendants a great nation. There is only one problem. He still has no children with Sarai. Abram must have feared he was the reason for God's inactivity. Abram had made many mistakes. You can find those mistakes between Genesis 12 thru 16. Yet in Genesis 17, we discover that God's great promise had not been forgotten. To underscore this reaffirmation, God changes Abram's name. Abram is now to be called Abraham. Abram means "exalted father." Abraham means "father of many" or "father of the multitude." The covenant is not just reestablished. It is expanded. Abraham's self-confidence must have been restored. The way you look at yourself changes everything.

My goal today is to help you restore your self-confidence. That is no small task. How many people do you know who struggle with self-doubt? Do you struggle with self-doubt? It is a serious issue. Have you ever stopped to consider Satan puts self-doubt into your life because he does not want you to maximize your full potential? He wants you to live in a shell, afraid to come out. God, on the other hand, wants you to live up to your full potential. He wants you to have the greatest impact on your little corner of the world because you are His ambassador. After all, you are a disciple of Jesus Christ! I am going to restore your self-confidence by asking you three questions. Each correct answer is illustrated in Abraham's story. So, if you are ready to defeat your self-doubts and become the person God intended, say, "**Amen!**"

Do you know who you are?

This is the first question. Do you know yourself? Abraham was 99 years old in the Bible story. That means he had 99 years to learn about the world and himself. That is one of the things I like about growing older. Proverbs 20:29 says, "*The glory of the young is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old.*" Experience has taught me age makes us secure. When you are young you feel like you have something to prove. You must be the fastest. You must be the strongest. You must be well-versed in automotive repairs, construction, and French cooking. You must be the best looking and the most successful. Being young is exhausting. The older you grow, the less you must prove and the more you learn to like yourself. Today, the only person I am trying to impress is myself. I am no longer trying to impress you and I do not care if you do not like me. I do not want to sound arrogant. However, I do want to sound secure.

The most liberating words in my life are the words, "I don't know!" I am quite comfortable confessing my ignorance. I know nothing about plumbing, auto repair,

foreign policy, sewing, crafts, and the finer details of physics. I cannot speak a word of Portuguese. I cannot read music or play a musical instrument. Except for my award-winning chili, I do not cook, but I will eat anything. I do not know anyone interviewed on the late-night talk shows. Saying, "I don't know," does not mean you do not know anything. It only means "I don't know" about certain things. I do not know anything about cardiology, but I know something about God, preaching, the Bible, church growth and group dynamics. I know I love my wife and my wife loves me. This is the truth: I like being sixty-three years old because I have had sixty-three years to learn about myself, my strengths, and my weaknesses. I have grown secure. Abraham had ninety-nine years to learn about himself. Does anyone here know everything? When was the last time you uttered those three little words, "I don't know?" Abraham knew who he was, and so did Jesus. Let me ask you the first question again, do you know who you are? Self-confident people know themselves. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Do you know yourself?

Do you know whose we are?

This is the second question: Do you know whose you are? That is Abraham's story. We can relate to him because he was so much like us. Genesis 12-16 is filled with one story after another about his mistakes. If God was looking for perfection, then He would have passed over Abraham. However, this is the good news. God was not looking for perfection and accepted the imperfect Abraham to be the father of a great nation. It is still true today. If God was looking for perfection, then God would have passed over us. God hungers to be with us not because we are perfect. God hungers to be with us because he loves us.

One of the great preachers of yesteryear was Philip Brooks (1835-1893). He was extremely confident and optimistic. A close friend asked him what the source of his attitude about life was. He replied, "*It is really quite simple. I am a Christian.*" Once you discover God's love for you, everything changes. Just think about it for a second. God claims you as his child. In the end, God will be victorious, and He wants to share the spoils of that victory with you! It really does not matter what the world says about you. The only thing that really matters is that God loves you! Jesus was self-confident because he knew whose he was. Abraham was self-confident because he knew whose he was. You should be self-confident because God loves you too. Let me ask you the second question again, do you know whose you are? Self-confident people know they are loved by God. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Do you know who you are? Do you know whose you are?

Do you know where you are going?

This is the third and final question: Do you know where you are going? Abraham had hope. He knew he had a bright future. He was going to be the father of a great nation. In the Christian faith, Jesus had hope. He knew he was going to heaven when his suffering in this world was over. May we never forget that Jesus suffered. The Apostle's Creed says: *He (Jesus) suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.*

Jesus knew he was going to heaven when it was all over. All he had to do was hold on, but it is not just Jesus's story. It is our story too.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt completely defeated? There did not seem to be any escape and every day was a challenge. It was a challenging situation, but you have hope because you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. You know the main event is not this world. The main event is heaven. Someday the challenges of this world are going to be over and you get to go heaven! I have said it a million times. The only things that really matter are the things that will matter in one hundred years. The only thing that will matter in one hundred years is Jesus. Someday we are going to heaven! Let me ask you the third question again, do you know where you are going? Self-confident people are hopeful. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" When you find yourself defeated by self-doubt, ask yourself these three questions: Do you know who you are? Do you know whose you are? Do you know where you are going? Let me end with this story.

History tells us Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was the sixteenth president of the United States. His life is well documented, so it should come as no surprise that he was shot at Washington DC's Ford Theater on April 14, 1865. He died at the Petersen House across the street from the theater a day later. Due to his height, they laid him sideways on the bed. He is considered the last casualty of the American Civil War. The political climate of America on that day was ugly. The country was in turmoil and was ripped to shreds by hatred and a cruel, costly war. In the past, I told you about the items found inside of Lincoln's pockets on that horrible evening. Do you remember them? In President Lincoln's pockets were found:

1. A handkerchief, embroidered "A. Lincoln"
2. A country boy's pen knife
3. A spectacles case repaired with string
4. A purse containing a \$5 Confederate bill
5. Some newspaper clippings

One of the newspaper clippings was an article written by British statesman John Bright (1811-1889). He called Lincoln, "one of the greatest minds of all times." Today, that is common knowledge, but that was not the case in Lincoln's time. Lincoln's critics were fierce. Lincoln kept Bright's words for one reason. He could not believe anyone would say he had a great mind. All these years later, we can confess the truth. Lincoln suffered from depression and self-doubt.

I do not have an article which says you are one of the great minds of all time, but I do have a divine truth that cannot be debated. You are a child of God! There is no reason to be filled with self-doubt. You are so valuable to God. You are so valuable to God He sent Jesus into the world so you can spend eternity with him. I hope you do. Canadian author Marty Rubin (born 1964) once said, "*Self-doubt inflicts the deepest wounds.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"