

JUNE 25, 2017

BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“SOLD OUT”

Pastor Becky Smithey

Scripture: Genesis 22:1-14

In a small Texas town, a new bar started a building to open up their business. A local church started a campaign of petitions and prayers to block the bar from opening. Work progressed, however, right up till the week before opening, when a lightning strike hit the bar and it burned to the ground.

The church folks were rather smug in their outlook after that, till the bar owner sued the church on the grounds that the church was ultimately responsible for the demise of his building, either through direct or indirect actions or means. The church vehemently denied all responsibility or any connection to the building's demise in its reply to the court.

As the case made its way into court, the judge looked over the paperwork. At the hearing he commented, “I don't know how I'm going to decide this, but as it appears from the paperwork, we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer, and an entire church congregation that doesn't.”

Sometimes it's inconvenient to have faith. Because with faith comes the responsibility to act on what you believe.

James, the brother of Jesus, writes in James Chapter 2: *“What good is it...if a [person] claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save him?”*

There is a big difference in being merely a fan of Jesus versus being a follower or disciple. Christianity is a team sport—and we are all called to be on the field!!!

Christianity is also an extreme sport. It takes guts. It is demanding. It can be dangerous.

And therefore, it is something that must be fueled by a burning faith that God is good—and that nothing can separate us from God's love!!!

The great faith chapter of the Bible is found in the Letter of the Hebrews Chapter 11. In it we are told, *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see...”*

...By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice...Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back for death.”

In Romans 4, Paul informs us that *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed...”*

Do we believe God?

Against all hope...do we believe God?

Are we fully persuaded that God has the power to do what God has promised?

In less than one month, we will be hosting our annual Back to School Carnival at our Administrative Outreach Building. As you know with the Ice Cream Challenge, we are working very hard to raise funds to provide 400 children with a FULL bag of school supplies—everything they would need to start school, and NEW clothes and underwear. If it's anything like last year, there will be about 600 people milling around, visiting the vendors and resource people we will be bringing in for them, playing carnival games, getting their face painted, visiting our petting zoo, climbing through a fire truck, and getting to know a police officer—on good terms.

We will have the opportunity and the privilege to be Christ to our community as we pass out free gifts, provide opportunities for prayer, and even a cup of cold water,

There will be a lot of people there who do not have a church home...probably the majority. There will be a lot of folks who may be surprised that everything we are offering is free of charge! We will be there representing Christ, the One who freely gives and calls us to freely give as well. Perhaps some folks will not want what we have to offer. Maybe some people will be rude. We will not be rude back. We will smile and offer Christ.

For against all hope we believe God is able to deliver on God's promises, and that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from God's love made known to us in Christ Jesus!!!

I hope as many of us as possible will come out. I also encourage every one of us to share our faith openly and without shame to all the folks we come in contact with. This does not mean we shove our beliefs down other people's throats. It means we show people love in all we say, do and think...that they may get to know us, and therefore...be open to relationship with our Savior! And this takes faith!

Jesus has given us our marching orders. In Matthew Chapter 28 Jesus says, *"Do not be afraid...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

When we hear this, we may appreciate it as good advice, but unrealistic for us personally. Some of us may think, "I am not an eloquent speaker. How can I do this?" Others of us may think, "I am shy. I have a hard time opening up to others. I cannot possibly do this." Did not Jesus say, "with God all things are possible."? Do we believe this?

Abraham, the father of us all--in the spiritual sense, most definitely believed this to be true!!! God said to Abraham, *"Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there..."* My goodness. What in the world for? What an awful thing. There could be nothing worse or more difficult a task in all the world.

Abraham was a man to whom God had promised long ago: *"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you...."* And yet Abraham remained childless for a hundred years.

But then, miracle of all miracles, Abraham's wife Sarah, finally became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac (whose name means 'He laughs' for Isaac brought laughter into their lives...into their household...they had become a happy family).

And it was through Isaac that God promised to establish God's covenant with Abraham as an "everlasting covenant for [Isaac's] descendants after him," that God will be their God and Abraham will be the father of many nations.

So how is that supposed to take place if Abraham believes God; does what God says and sacrifices Isaac as a burnt offering in the region of Moriah?

Abraham doesn't know...but Abraham believes that God is good and that God is going to deliver on God's promise...

As the writer of the letter of the Hebrews indicates, perhaps Abraham thought God would bring Isaac back from the dead. He believed God would come through no matter the circumstances.

God keeps God's Word!!! Let's remember that when the world lets us down. Let's remember that when we are tempted to quit. Let's remember that when everything seems dark...and the doom and gloom are threatening! God's plans for us are good; and God keeps God's Word!

Abraham believed this and acted on this faith. And he acted right away!!!

Notice in verse 3 of our Old Testament lesson that Abraham didn't wait around for God to change God's mind. No. "Early the next morning," Abraham set out on this most trying mission.

How often do we put off the call of God on our lives until the opportunity has passed...and it is too late to do what we know God has called us to do? How often have you felt called to help someone or reach out to someone in the name of and with the love of Jesus...but your indecision...your fear...caused you to miss the chance?

What are we so afraid of?

God is good!

God is for us!

God has great plans for us!

Nothing can separate us from God!

So Abraham and Isaac headed out for the place God had told Abraham about.

And "As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?' ...where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham's reply?

"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." In other words, "God is good. God is in control. We are to trust in God and God will provide!"

How many of us are able to pull this one off? How many of us are able to trust that God is in control and that God will provide?

Jesus told the first evangelists—the Apostles not to worry about money—what they would eat and what they would drink...and as Jesus sent them on their first evangelism mission they were instructed not to take any money with them...God would provide!

And yet, how many times have mission ideas—God ideas to reach our community for Christ been thrown in the trash because we are afraid we don't have enough money or resources to carry them out? People are worth much more than money!

Being Christ to the world—if it takes every penny we have—it is what we must do!!!

In the book Justice in the Burbs: Being the Hands of Jesus Wherever You Live the author writes about a time of enlightenment on her Christian Journey. "I realized something about myself I never had before," the author writes, "I spent loads of money. And when I did that, I kept myself from helping others the way Jesus wanted me to do."

Do we not believe that God will provide what is necessary to do God's will? Let's catch ourselves when and if we find ourselves saying, "Oh, we can't do that. It will take too much money!"

Are we sold out to God? It's the only way to live!!!

Abraham was sold out. Abraham believed God even though all reason and hope seemed to go against this faith! And God proved that God is trustworthy!!!

God Himself did indeed provide the Lamb for the offering!!!

And that Lamb is Jesus Christ...God's only Son whom God loves!!! Jesus Christ died the death we deserve. Jesus Christ is our sacrificial Lamb. Jesus Christ atones for our sins! And Jesus Christ gives us life, meaning, and reason to hope and live!!!

At Holston Annual Conference a few years back, our Mission Offering that year and was directed toward the work of the United Methodist Church in South Sudan.

The people of Sudan are victims of oppression, torture, and genocide and are currently living in yet another Refugee Camp. Even our Missionaries are displaced and living in tents.

At Annual Conference, the Hope for Africa's Children's Choir...a group of United Methodist Children from Sudan performed. It was the most moving part of Conference.

A twelve year old child from Sudan, whose mother and father had been killed when she was very young stood with a triumphant, huge, confident and beautiful smile as she shared with us her favorite verse of Scripture which she had memorized.

It comes from Philippians 4:13: *"I can do everything through [Christ] who gives me strength."*

If a little child who cannot even fathom the freedoms and privileges that so many of us take for granted can stand up with confidence—give her testimony with a huge smile; sing and dance for God before thousands of people...and have the dream of one day being a doctor...if she can believe and trust in the goodness of God in such a way...well, we should have no problem trusting and believing God whatsoever!!!

We are called to be Christ to our community.

We are called to be followers of Jesus Christ to change the world!

And we do this with faith...the faith God gives us...as messy people who are to join hands with other messy people and follow Jesus into the Promised Land!!!