

2nd Sunday in Easter 2019 – Genesis 15:1-6

Do you feel more like an Abram or a Thomas this post-Easter Sunday? Here we are one week removed from the greatest Sunday on the calendar; one week removed from a church filled with people and flowers and sunlight and singing.

Do you feel more like an Abram or a Thomas in this post-Easter haze?

Maybe you need a little more information to answer that question.

Our first reading today from Genesis 15 and our Gospel reading for today see to give us two God-fearing men at opposite ends of the trust spectrum.

You have Abram, fresh off a resounding victory that saved his nephew Lot from the hands of some raiding kings, who hears some really good news. God promised him that he would have a flesh and blood heir, that his family would grow to rival the stars in number. And Abram's response to this really good news: **"Abram believed the Lord."**

And you have Thomas, fresh off one of the worst weekends of his life when Jesus was taken from him and crucified, who also hears some really good news. **"We have seen the Lord!"** was the claim of his closest friends. And Thomas' response to this really good news: **"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."**

Here we are, a week removed from one of the greatest, happiest days of the Christian year. Do you feel more like an Abram or a Thomas?

God has given you some really good news again this Easter.

Jesus is alive. And that good news ought to change everything for you.

Jesus alive means your past is redeemed. All of the things in life that you regret, all of the things you should have said but didn't, all of the things you shouldn't have said, but did, all of the wild oats sown, all of it is completely forgiven. Not only does Jesus alive redeem what you have done in the past it redeems what has been done to you in the past. The hurtful things others have done and said – you don't have to hold on to those grudges, you don't have to obsess about the way people have treated you in the past because Jesus alive is more than enough to heal those wounds too.

That's the good news for your past, do you hear it and feel more like Abram: "Amen, Pastor! Preach it!"... or do the guilt, shame, anger and resentment in your heart betray a Thomas where you maybe want it to be true, but you aren't sure?

Jesus alive means your present is secure. No matter what you are going through right now Jesus can handle it. If Jesus can take on death and come out the other side on top, he can handle whatever is on your plate right now.

That's the good news for your past, do you hear it and feel more like Abram: "Amen, Pastor! Preach it!"... or do the stress, anxiety, restlessness in your heart betray a Thomas where you maybe want it to be true, but you aren't sure?

Jesus alive means your future is certain. There are a lot of things that could happen to you tomorrow. You know this. In a world that has been trashed by sin you know that many of the things that could happen tomorrow could be really hard and really scary. Freak accidents, sudden onset of symptoms, surprising diagnosis, a turn in the economy, on and on the list goes. But Jesus alive means that no matter what tomorrow brings you already know what forever brings – any light and momentary troubles you may face tomorrow will be proved just that, light and momentary, compared to the eternity that Jesus alive means for you.

That's the good news for your past, do you hear it and feel more like Abram: "Amen, Pastor! Preach it!"... or do the worry and fear in your heart betray a Thomas where you maybe want it to be true, but you aren't sure?

Jesus is risen. That is the gospel truth.

Do you believe the Lord like Abram in Genesis 15?

Do you doubt like Thomas in John 20?

Are you more like Thomas or more like Abram?

But it's not as simple as that, is it? It's not as if some of us here are exactly like Abram in Genesis 15 and have good reason to break our own arms patting ourselves on the back this morning because of how steady our faith is. It's not as if the rest of us here are exactly like Thomas in John 20 and should feel nothing but the embarrassment Thomas probably felt when Jesus chastises him for doubting.

It's not as simple as that – as if we are either one or the other.

Just look at Abram and Thomas.

Yes, in Genesis 15 Abram believes the Lord and his promise, but do you know what happens in Genesis 16? After a decade of unsuccessfully trying to have a child with his wife Sarai, a plan is hatched. Sarai gives her servant Hagar to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." And Abram agrees.

On that day in Genesis 15 Abram believed, but after ten years of trying unsuccessfully to start that star-numbering family, he and his wife took matters into their own hands – not exactly the definition of trust...

Yes, in John 20 doubting Thomas rightly earns his unenviable moniker, but open your Bibles up to John 11. When Lazarus was dead and Jesus wanted to go see him, the rest of the disciples couldn't believe it. They had left Judea because the people had tried to stone Jesus, and now he was going back? But Thomas, in the only other words we hear from him in the Bible said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." That sounds like a man of faith to me! And if church history is right, this same Thomas would go as far as India preaching about his Lord and God until he was stoned, shot with arrows, left to die until run through by a pagan priest with a spear still confessing his Lord and his God.

So really, my answer to that question I posed earlier is, “Both. I feel like both Abram and Thomas.” Ask me today, when I’m feeling pretty good, doing something I love, in a place I love, with people I love and I’m feeling pretty Abram like – basking in the glow of my risen Jesus, trusting in him. But ask me tomorrow when life throws the inevitable curve ball at me and I might not be so bold.

On any given day, in any given situation I prove myself to be made of the same stuff as Abram *and* Thomas – one minute resolved in my faith in the good news of my risen Jesus and the next floundering in doubt and all the shame, anger, resentment, stress, and worry that doubt produces.

And friends that truth about us (that we are just like Abram and Thomas), is why Easter still matters, one week removed. It’s why Easter matters every minute of every day. My faithfulness to my risen Lord and God is as fickle as spring in Wisconsin – one minute warm and sunny, the next dumping 5 inches of snow in my doubting heart.

My faith is fickle like Abram and Thomas, but the faithful love of my God for me hasn’t wavered a bit.

From before the creation of the world he knew me and he loved me. He knew my Abram Genesis 15 moments and my Thomas John 20 moments, he knew my flaws, my failures, my fickle faith, and he still claimed me as his own.

And then, when the time had fully come, God sent his Son to show me that his faithfulness endures forever.

Easter means that our failures do not define us. Neither, for that matter, do our victories. Only Jesus and his love for us defines who we are.

But I can't walk away from a sermon on faithfulness without talking about how our faith, while always fickle, can be made stronger.

While it is true that this side of eternity our faith will never be perfect, the Bible also makes clear that we can grow in faith. Abram for all his lapses in faith was still praised for his faith by God in Genesis 15 (Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness) and in Romans and Hebrews God doubles down on his praise of Abram’s faith.

So, how do we get better at this trust thing?

There is only one way I know, and the Bible backs it up. More Jesus.

What did Thomas need to get over his doubting hump? More Jesus. He needed more Jesus, and more Jesus is exactly what he got – that beautifully patient invitation of Jesus, “Stick your hand here, Thomas, I’m alive.”

What did Abram need to get over his fear of not having kids? More Jesus, more promises, more proof that God does what he promises. This was the second time God had promised Abram offspring. God would remake this promise to Abram two more times until Abram, renamed Abraham (Father of many nations) finally had his baby boy Isaac (named after the doubt-fueled laughter of Sarah at the thought of God keeping his promise when she was 90 years old).

God strengthened Abram's faith by giving him more of himself, so that Abram the man of imperfect faith would eventually show the strength of his faith by almost sacrificing his only son at God's request.

This is how God has operated with Abram and Thomas, when their faith wasn’t strong, he gave them more of himself, more of his love, more of his promises. The same is true for us. There is only one way our faith can grow - more Jesus.

You may not be able to stick your hand in his side, like Thomas. You may not have him come and give you specific promises like Abram, but make no mistake about it, Jesus wants to give you more of himself.

Every time you sit in this building in silence and hear the water gently flowing in that baptismal font, Jesus is there, giving himself to you, reminding you that you are a dearly loved child of God.

Every time you come stand around this altar and eat the bread and drink the wine, Jesus is there, giving himself to you, letting you taste and see that he is good, that his love for you endures forever.

Every time you crack open your Bible at home around the dinner table with your family or alone over a cup of coffee in the morning, Jesus is there, giving himself to you in the words that were written that you might believe that he is the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

All along the way God's faithfulness will never change. But ours can, never perfectly, but by the grace of God ours can...

This is what Easter is all about. A God who keeps giving us more of himself so that we can know his faithful love better and in the process, have our faith find its strength and peace in him.

So are we Abram or Thomas? Both, by the grace of God we are sinners loved by a faithful God.

Peace be with you.

Amen.