

Sermon for February 28, 2021

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This past week I caught the tail end of the news briefing which followed Tiger Wood's terrible car accident. The news reporter was explaining that he had spoken with one of Tiger's good friends, a man who had golfed alongside Tiger throughout his life. The reporter had asked the friend, "What is it you want Tiger to know right now?" The friend had responded that he hoped Tiger knew he had worth and impact beyond the golf game - that he was loved just for being Tiger.

Is this not what each of us needs to hear? You have worth beyond "the game" – beyond what you are known for *doing*. You are loved for just being you – child of God.

In today's scripture readings we encounter Abraham. Abraham is often held up as a Bible hero, the father of all nations. We remember that Abraham left his homeland to follow as God called. We remember Abraham climbed the mountain to sacrifice his only Son as commanded by God. We think of what Abraham *does*. We think of him as worthy, or righteous, because of *his* actions.

But it is interesting to read today's text to consider Abraham's action in these passages and remember where he finds his worth... it is beyond the "game" – beyond what he is known for doing.

In our Genesis reading we learn that Abraham is 99 years old when the Lord appears to him. God speaks to Abraham and he does not start by explaining who Abraham is and why he is being chosen. God starts "I am God Almighty". God then goes on to speak of what is to come "I will make my covenant between me and you. I have made you the ancestor of a multitude. I will make you fruitful. I will make nations of you. I will establish my covenant." Abraham is not the one *doing* in this relationship. God is the one who acts. "I am, I will, I have..."

The only action Abraham takes in this encounter – he falls on his face before God.

Abraham knows that only God is righteous.

God's covenant to Abraham is "to be God to you and to your offspring after you". God marks the covenant by giving Abram and Sarai new names - a reminder of whose they are.

Our New Testament reading brings us back to this story of Abraham. In Romans we are reminded that the promise to Abraham did not come through the works of the law and through Abraham's righteousness – the promise depends on faith, rests on God's grace, God's action. We are reminded that it is God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist – God is Almighty and it is because of this that Abraham is able to Hope against Hope. Romans says "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb".

“He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was already as good as dead...” Imagine that? I imagine a modern Abraham slowly making his way to the mirror and gazing at himself - patting down the few remaining hairs on the top of his balding head, tracing the lines of his wrinkles, feeling his age and yet smiling - hoping beyond hope in the promise of God, believing he still has worth simply because he belongs to the Almighty God. I imagine him humbly lowering his face and whispering “I am good as dead but I am God’s – and God acts...” God says “I am, I will, I have...”

I don’t know about you but there are days I feel “good as dead”. Days when I feel empty, with nothing to offer. Days I whisper “I’m not, I can’t, I won’t.”

It has been interesting to reflect on our human response to this pandemic year. We are such frantic doers. Our worth is so caught up in our ability to do. We worry about our children falling behind, our tasks not being achieved, our days being wasted. We are stressed about what we can put on a scholarship, a resume...even an obituary? Imagine writing “I am good as dead.” It is counter cultural to receive without doing...it is counter cultural to live by grace alone.

Do you believe the promise of God, God’s love for you, rests on grace alone?

Can you *do* nothing but fall on your face before God and know that you still have worth?

Romans goes on to remind us our identity, our worth is also not found in the works of the law, in our own righteousness, our own actions. Rather we too are found righteous, worthy, in God through Jesus Christ alone.

Daive Steindl-Rast writes “Translated in our terms today, the message of Jesus is: You belong! You don’t have to earn it, this ultimate belonging. It is a given fact. It’s the most basic truth of your life. Don’t you know that in your heart of hearts?...By grace you have been saved. You belong...We merely need to accept the gift...”

The promise that God spoke to Abraham “to be God to you and to your offspring after you” remains true for us today. We belong to God.

If you struggle to hear this truth through Abraham’s story - that it is not about our doing – consider Peter from our Gospel reading. Peter – the disciple who calls Jesus Messiah and then rebukes him. Peter who jumps out of the boat and then sinks. Peter who gets a glimpse of the divine and responds by wanting to camp out. Peter who goes with Jesus to the garden and yet falls asleep instead of praying. Peter who promises to stay with Jesus yet deserts him. Peter who says he will not betray and yet does it three times in the same evening. Yet in the Gospel of Mark at the announcement of the resurrection, the young man at the tomb tells the woman to go and tell Peter that Jesus says “I have gone ahead of you. I will see you in Galilee”. It is not about what Peter does – it is about God taking action towards Peter.

It isn't about what we do, it is about whose we are, God taking action towards us. God the Almighty promises "I am, I will, I have... and you belong to me."

Our Psalm ends today "They shall proclaim God's deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying to them 'The Lord has acted!'"

Let us stop trying to do it ourselves. Let us confidently claim that we are "good as dead", that we are empty. Let us fall on our face and proclaim 'the Lord has acted!'

What is it God wants you to know right now? You have worth without the game. You are loved just as you are. Hope beyond hope. Thanks be to God!