

Genesis 17:1-5

February 28, 2021

There are two things Abraham must do in our text. We know what one of these is. He is to father a multitude of nations. To live up to his name, in other words, because that is what the name Abraham means. Not an easy task for a man about to turn one hundred and whose barren wife is turning ninety. In fact, it is impossible. Which is why God does not ask Abraham if he's up for the challenge. Rather, God tells him that this is how it will be.

The second thing Abraham must do is just as impossible as the first. He is to walk before God and be blameless. And so again, God does not ask Abraham if he wants to give this a try. He simply tells him to do it.

I guess when you're a patriarch, much more is expected of you. Aren't we glad that God does not require of us what He required of Abraham? Oh, but He does. Most certainly, He does. Not to wait until we are in our nineties to have children. And not to keep the Ten Commandments perfectly in thought, word, and deed. There is something even more impossible than these, even though yes, these are impossible for us. It amounts to this: not putting a question mark where God has put a period.

God told Abraham, "*I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*" This is past tense language. It already happened. "*I have made you.*" But wait. Isaac was not yet conceived in the womb of Sarah. Abraham could have put his question marks all over this. "But God, how? Are You serious? Who, me and Sarah, father and mother, at our age?" Yet none of this came from Abraham. God said it. It is done. Period.

This is faith. Is it any wonder that Abraham is referred to in Romans 4 as the father of all believers? This means, not that he was the first to believe, but that Abraham's faith is the faith of all who believe.

God does not tell us to conceive a miracle child. But He does tell us to bring the children He does give us to the church for baptism and instruction. There is no question mark here. God does not leave this up to us whether we feel we can do this or not. He says it, and it should be done, period.

But oh, how the question marks come. I think that in almost every Christian family, if you go out far enough, there are parents who question Holy Baptism. "How can baptism be of any benefit to my little baby? She is too young to even know the meaning of baptism."

But was not Abraham too old to have a child? Abraham could not understand what God was telling him to do any more than an infant can understand Holy Baptism. Yet what does understanding have to do with faith? Abraham believed God, not because his questions were answered, so he was able to say, "Oh, now I understand." Abraham believed without understanding. He believed because God said it...period.

Abraham's faith was the work of God in him. And so is the faith of a baptized infant, of which Jesus says, "*They believe in Me.*" To bring your little ones to Holy Baptism is to have the faith of Abraham. The faith God has worked in you.

There is no question mark ever placed next to baptism in Holy Scripture. But we are full of questions. Don't you think Abraham was too? Yet he did not give them a voice. Instead, God gave his faith a voice, and Abraham obeyed God.

And so, Abraham walked before God blamelessly. Was he perfect? No. Then how was he blameless? Again, by faith. Believing that he was blameless before God because God declared him to be blameless.

It's all about God's declarations. God declared Abraham to be the father of a multitude of nations, and so he was, for this he believed. And God declared Abraham to be blameless, and so he was, for this, too, he believed by faith.

God does the same for you. He declares you to be blameless. But here, too, we are full of question marks. We know the sins we commit. We know we are far from perfect. How, therefore, can we be without blame? If we were politicians, the answer is easy. Blame the other guy for what you did. And I do think it's true that we all act like politicians now and then. Yet the Scriptures declare, "*Your sins will find you out.*" To place blame with others is not the way of faith, but of unbelief.

Rather, listen to what God does. He blamed His Son for what you did, and what I did. Your sins found Jesus, the holy Lamb of God. And your sins and mine were charged to His account. And His holiness God declared to your account. No question marks in any of this. The Gospel has no question marks. It only has periods. God declares you blameless for Jesus' sake...period.

Nothing can be better than this Gospel truth. So why would anyone want to question it? Because faith is impossible. We do not have it within us to believe. By nature, all we can do is to question what God declares. But with God nothing is impossible. And so, Abraham believed God. And so with you, the fact that you believe, sharing the faith of Abraham, is evidence that God is at work in you.

And so, I have the joy of telling you what God declares. That your sins are forgiven. That He forgives all of you because Jesus went to the cross for all of you and took the blame for all that you did in thought, word, and deed. And I know that you believe this, not because you understand it; you believe in spite of the fact that this good news makes no sense to our human reason. You will not find any scientific data from the CDC to support this. If anything, the government will warn against believing this, for in most countries it does.

Your faith, like Abraham's faith, is nothing else but the work of God in you. You believe in spite of everything. And because you believe, you will, not might, but will walk before God blamelessly in the faith God gave you in your baptism. Amen.