

Genesis 18:20-32

Would you be so bold as to do what Abraham did? He bargained with God! Six times Abraham brought the number down that would save Sodom. Abraham didn't just plead for Lot and his family who lived in Sodom; he pleaded for all the people of the city. I think we do just the opposite. When a driver flies around us on the highway, don't we plead for justice? "Dear God, please give him what he deserves; let there be a police car up ahead." The people of Sodom deserved to be punished, but Abraham pleaded with God to spare their lives. He knew the heart of God. God is just and must punish the wicked. He does not overlook sin. He punishes the evildoer. But Abraham knew that God has a merciful heart. He knew that God loved the people of Sodom in spite of their wickedness. And so Abraham bargained and pleaded with God to spare the city.

Did it work? Was Abraham's prayer answered? The very next day, early in the morning, Sodom was destroyed by fire and brimstone. All of Abraham's bargaining and pleading did no good. If only he had kept going. If only he hadn't stopped at ten, but had lowered the number down to five, and then to four; because there were four in the city who were righteous. Lot, his wife, and their two daughters believed in the Lord. Why didn't Abraham keep bargaining with God until he got the number down to four?

He didn't know, did he? Abraham knew Lot and his family lived in Sodom, and surely he thought that through them God would have brought at least six others to the Faith. Abraham believed that ten was a pretty safe number. Certainly, besides Lot, a couple more families in the city were believers in the true God by this time. But he was wrong. No mission work had been done in Sodom. Just like in the days of Noah where only he and his family were saved from the Flood, so in Sodom, only Lot and his family were delivered from the destruction.

But they were rescued. As their world was being destroyed around them, God pulled Lot and his family out from the fiery destruction. And watching all the destruction from miles away stands a solitary figure on a mountaintop—Abraham, who just the day before had prayed that this would not happen.

Perhaps we shouldn't so much compare ourselves with Abraham as we should compare Abraham with Christ. It's not, "Would you and I do what Abraham did?" but, "Abraham did what Jesus would do." From the cross He pleads with His Heavenly Father, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." And Jesus didn't stop at ten. He lowered the number all the way down to one. "For My sake, and for Mine alone, dear Father, forgive them."

"There is none who is righteous, no not one"...except for Jesus. And He stands in the place of Abraham for you pleading with God to save you from the fire and brimstone of hell—not because we deserve to be saved, but because He took our punishment for us. Abraham stopped short of saying, "God, don't punish the people of Sodom; punish me instead." But Jesus did not stop short of saying it. That's why He came to our wicked world; not to change it, but to die for it. And God heard His prayer. For in the darkness of Good Friday, God rained down fire and brimstone upon the figure hanging from the center cross. Jesus was punished with the destruction of hell for all the evil which you and I have done.

The cross tells us that God is merciful in His heart not to those who are without sin, but to those who are wicked. The entire time Abraham was pleading with God for the people of Sodom, they were sinning. While Abraham was standing before God for them, the people of Sodom were robbing, murdering, committing rape and incest, and sexual sins of every kind—the entire time Abraham was pleading with God for them!

And that's what Jesus does for you and me. While we're speaking evil against our neighbor, Jesus stands before His Heavenly Father speaking on our behalf. While you and I are spreading gossip, Jesus is praying for us. While we're lusting with our eyes and harboring hatred in our heart, Jesus pleads, "Forgive them, Father, for I died for them." And His Father listens to His prayer. For the sake of Jesus, your Heavenly Father forgives you. He will not destroy you with this wicked world. Through Holy Baptism and through His Word and Sacrament He brings you, as He brought Lot, out from the fiery destruction.

This world will be destroyed. As Sodom was destroyed, so will this world burn up with intense heat—and not from global warming. By the hand of God, on the Last Day, this world will perish in Judgment. And all those who cling to it will perish with it. Those, whose lives are wrapped up in their work, and not in Christ, will be judged. Those, whose time is spent with family and friends, and not with God's Word and Sacraments, will suffer the fate of Sodom.

But Jesus pleads for you. He died for you. He suffered your punishment. He endured the fire and brimstone in your place. And here in the preaching of His Word; and here in His body and blood for you, He draws you to Himself in mercy just as He drew Lot out of the fires of destruction.

Abraham had Lot in his family. Lot was his nephew. And through Abraham's pleading for the people of Sodom, God delivered Lot. I'm certain that all of us have a "Lot" in our family as well—someone who is living in Sodom; clinging too much to this world; out of balance with their life so that there is not much time at all for the hearing of God's Word and the eating of His flesh and blood. If Abraham had not pleaded for Sodom, who would have? And if you and I don't plead for the "Lot's" in our families, who will?

Like Abraham, we know the heart of God; that He is merciful to sinners; that He desires not the death of the wicked, but wants all to be saved. We know that Jesus died for us and for the "Lot's" in our families. Early one morning Abraham watched as Sodom was destroyed. One morning you and I may wake up to the news that the time is past for our "Lot" to be saved. Now is the day of salvation. If you don't bring them to hear the preaching of the Word, who will? If we don't act on their behalf, who will?

Jesus already acted on behalf of all of us. For every sinner He died. For the people of Sodom He died. For you and for your loved ones He died. Lot is in heaven today because Abraham pleaded to the merciful God on his behalf. The city perished, but Lot was saved. God loves the "Lot's" in our families as much as He loved Abraham's Lot. His mercy goes out to all. Here in the Word and Sacrament is the mercy of God for you. Here there is forgiveness, life, and salvation. Here God draws you to His tender heart, forgiving you—and through you may He also draw many "Lot's" within our families to His heart of mercy—to Christ, the forgiving Word of God. Amen.

