

Lent 2 2/25/18
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 B

WORDS OF THE APPOINTED OLD TESTAMENT LESSON FOR THIS SUNDAY. "I AM GOD ALMIGHTY"

So, when Abram, the Exalted Father, is 99 years old, God appears to him and changes his name to the "Father of a Multitude," Abraham in English. To state the obvious: there's a little problem with that. Abraham has no children; not even one. And he's 99-years-old and his wife Sarah, the "mother of the nations," is 90-years-old. How can they conceive and bear a child at their age, so that they can be the Father of a Multitude and the Mother of the Nations?

We are not talking about adoption; or test tube baby, or surrogate. No, Abraham and Sarah are going to conceive a child and Sarah is going to give birth. And, it's not just going to be a, one, single baby boy – it's going to be lots and lots of baby boys and baby girls. God says that there are going to be nations and generations and they are all coming to come from Abraham and Sarah and that little boy of theirs.

But, when you think about that, it strikes you as how impossible it is. Paul writes to the Romans that Abraham's body was as good as dead, him being 99-years-old after all (cf. Rom 4:19). Yet, you know that story. Abraham and Sarah have Isaac and Isaac had Jacob and Jacob had 12 sons, and the nation of Israel grew, and they became multitudes and as numerous as sand upon the seashore and the stars in the sky.

How did this happen? How can this be? Simple: Who makes the promise? God Almighty. God Almighty keeps His promises and does what He says. Because He is almighty; He can do whatever He wants to do. His power is limitless. Nothing is impossible with God.

The story of the Father of the Multitudes is though He heard the promises of God, he wavered in his faith and thought he better help God out a little bit.

When Father Abraham was 70, the LORD appeared to him and said, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen 12:1). Moses tell us, "So Abram went as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him (Gen 12:4). Why is that important? Remember what the Lord God commanded Abraham to do? "Go from your country and your kindred." Lot was Abraham's nephew. He was part of that "kindred" God commanded to leave behind. So, to ask that Lutheran question: What does this mean? It means that because Abraham and Sarah have no children, he is already seeing Lot, his nephew, as his legal heir.

Fast forward and Abraham becomes very wealthy in livestock and silver and gold and Lot also had flocks and herds, and the land could not support them both, so they separate; they go their separate ways. What does this mean? Abraham has no heir. God again appears to him, and Abraham thinks Eliezer of Damascus, his servant, is his heir.

And don't forget the rest of the story: Sarah thought she had to help out a little, too. The Mother of the Nations comes up with the plan that her husband should conceive a child her maidservant. And Moses tells us, "Abraham agreed" (Gen 16:2).

Time and time again, God appears to Abraham and tells him that all the nations, all the people who would ever live, would be blessed through him. Abraham forgets who makes the promise, and so he decides he has to help God out a little bit. For Abraham, maybe -- just maybe -- God was not Almighty and doesn't always know what He's doing.

Shocked at that? You've maybe heard those silly, stupid words of human reason, "God helps those who help themselves." And maybe, just maybe, in the weakness of your human flesh, you've not just heard those words, you've believed them.

Maybe, just maybe, God, He who holds you in the palm of your hand, is not really almighty over everything, so you trust in lady luck, you cross your fingers for good luck, you have even checked your horoscope to see if you should go golfing today. You want God's grace and favor, so you don't eat meat on Friday, or you don't dance, or you don't play cards. Or, maybe you fast. Now to be certain, our *Small Catechism* teaches us that fasting is indeed fine outward preparation for Holy Communion because it reminds us of our human weakness, but fasting does not earn us God's grace and favor, and especially not – clearly hear I said not – earn you the forgiveness of your sins.

The fact is God does not need your help to give you His grace and favor. The fact is for God Almighty, nothing is impossible. He knit you together in your mother's womb. He has made you and all creatures. He has given you your

body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your reason and all your senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives you clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home spouse and children, land, animals, and all you have. He richly and daily provides you with all that you need to support your body and life. He defends you against all danger and guards and protects you from all evil (cf. 1st Article).

Oh, by the way, He does all of that only "out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in you.

God really doesn't need your help; because nothing is impossible for God Almighty. In fact, He takes care of you in a way that you could never do for yourself – and He does it through one of the offspring of Abraham.

You are born sinful and unclean. No, I'm not picking on you this morning. I'm simply telling you what God Almighty says about each and everyone of us in His Word. We are all conceived and born in sin. Because, of that we deserve God's temporal and eternal punishment. You said so yourself in your confession this morning. And you can no more change that than a 99-year-old man whose body is as good as dead and a 90-year-old woman whose woman is barren can conceive and give birth to a child all on their own.

We can't change that, but God Almighty can and God Almighty did. Sarah did give birth to Isaac; and from Isaac came Jacob; and from Jacob came Judah; and on and on it went through the generations until the Holy Spirit came upon a virgin named Mary.

Jesus was conceived and born because God so loved the world. Paul remind us in our reading that while we were still sinners, Jesus came into this world to take all of your sin from you (cf. Rom 5:8). He took it all to Calvary's cross. He died was buried for those sins and He rose again the 3rd day, but your sin all stayed dead and buried.

Because Satan could not keep Jesus from the cross, life and salvation are ours in Him. The Lord Jesus Christ rose to give you all the forgiveness and life and salvation that He won for you in and through the waters of your baptism. And, He still gives you forgiveness and life and salvation through the absolution and the eating and drinking of His life-giving body and blood.

And with that forgiveness and life and salvation comes the strength and desire to take up our cross and follow Him. Like Abraham and Sarah when they walked upon the earth, today, we have the promises of God and walk by faith in those promises, because God is Almighty, and He keeps His promises and does what He says.