

12 S. after Pentecost 8/23/20
Isaiah 51:1-6 16A

“LISTEN TO ME ... LOOK TO THE ROCK FROM WHICH YOU WERE HEWN, AND TO THE [CISTERN] FROM WHICH YOU WERE DUG. LOOK TO ABRAHAM YOUR FATHER AND TO SARAH WHO BORE YOU.”

One of the biggest industries in America right now is genealogy. You've seen the ads on tv, right? Do a cheek swab and send it in and you will receive your DNA code. There is a lot of money being made in the genealogy business today because inquiring minds, especially Baby Boomers, want to know not just where they came from, but many want to learn about family medical history. Does heart disease run in the family? Cancer? Diabetes? What sorts of health issues did my forefathers live with and die from that I may need to be concerned about? The old adage is true: Knowing where I came from helps me to know and understand where I'm going...or said another way, “Those who don't know and learn from their history are doomed to repeat it.”

I bring all this up because the world we live in, play in, and work in is sinfully sick and dying...and, it's scary. Just think about all the news you've heard over the past week alone. Looting and anarchy continue in our streets. Rioters in Seattle pelted police officers with rocks, bottles, and explosives. You've seen the video of the driver in Portland who crashed his vehicle to avoid the mob and then, is beaten unconscious when he exited his vehicle. The uncertainty of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. That's not even taking into consideration all the other sickening garbage we're exposed to on a daily basis: profanity, promiscuity, adultery, greed, lies, theft, murder; not to mention the defaming and discrediting of the Christian faith, all of which is socially acceptable and even endorsed by

celebrities, athletes, and politicians. Scary stuff! Being a faithful Christian in the midst of all the darkness of this sin is makes us feel lowly and lonely.

And yet...consider our genealogy. Is any of this terrifying sinfulness brand new to humanity? No, the history of fallen mankind is the story of immorality, terrorism, disease, and disobedience to God, which is why I call your attention to the words of our Lord in our Old Testament lesson,

“Listen to Me ... Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the [cistern] from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you” (vv. 1, 2).

God first spoke these words thousands of years ago to the faithful Israelites as they were struggling with the darkness of sin that surrounded them. Israel was in decline; her golden days were behind her. The Assyrians had conquered the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom. Now, they threatening them and Jerusalem itself. Her religious and political leaders were bad, to say the least. They were trying to win the favor of their enemies with gold and riches. Instead of turning to the Lord their God in repentance, they were trusting in human resources and human relationships. And make no mistake about it, they had accumulated any number of prophets who, unlike Isaiah, told them what their itching ears wanted to hear.

The faithful Israelites were few in number. Many of their own friends and family had forsaken the God who created them, provided for them, and redeemed them. These faithful few were looking around and what they saw scared them to no end! “What can we do? The Church is growing old and dying. It’s not relevant anymore. It’s not hip. How can we fix it? How can we make Church cool? How can we get more money and more young people?” Sound familiar to anyone?

“Listen to Me ... Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the [cistern] from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you” (vv 1-2). Dearest Children of the Heavenly Father, these words are every bit as relevant for us today as they were for our forefathers 2700 years ago. The Lord our God calls us back to our genealogy; to our family tree. I want to especially call your attention to Isaiah’s words, “rock” and “cistern”. God is using these specific terms and images for a reason.

How much life is in a rock? What life can a rock produce? It’s not my intention to make the sermon a biology lesson, but have you ever heard of two rocks procreating and making a little rock? Of course not! A rock is lifeless and dead – Just like 99-year-old Abraham. In fact, God even tells us multiple times in Scripture, that Abraham was “as good as dead,” when it came to procreation (cf. Ro 4:19; He 11:12).

The same can be said for his wife, Sarah, who is likened to a “quarry” or “cistern,” which you may have noticed I am saying because I think it is a more accurate translation. What is a cistern? This is why we have Google, but some you may remember cisterns. Basically, a cistern is a big cement pit or pool that is designed to hold water. However, what are we told of Sarah’s condition? God tells us that her womb was dried-up; an empty cistern, if you will. It was incapable of sustaining or providing life.

And yet, who are we talking about? Our God Himself calls out attention to our forefather and foremother of the faith! How did Abraham and Sarah come to conceive and give birth to Isaac, the child of promise? God granted it! He made it happen! From two empty, lifeless sources—a rock and an empty cistern—God Himself produced offspring as

numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand upon the seashore, which you and I are part of today through faith.

Which brings us back to August 23, 2020, to our present-day fears and concerns, which bring us back to the very words of our Lord and Savior in response to Peter's confession that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God." "Blessed are you...for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And on this rock-solid confession I will build My Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." This world is scary, no doubt. But ...it's always been scary. Our family history shows it's been scary ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden. Since then, we poor sinners have been running and hiding and scared. Church history teaches us that virtually every generation of Christians fear that the church is doing to die off with their generation.

But, faith hears, trusts, believes, and finds comfort in those words of Jesus. "Don't worry," says the Lord of the Church. "On this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18). You have My promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against My Church. Stay faithful. Remain in this rock-solid confession of faith, and I will take care of the building up and protecting and nourishing and leading." And take note: This is Christ's Church, and He does the building, protecting, nourishing, and leading. He Himself says so. "I will build My Church."

He built His Church when from heaven He came, when He was born of virgin mother, and sought her to be His holy bride, with His own blood He bought her from sin, death, and the devil. Upon the cross, the blood of Jesus was shed as the punishment for all our worries and fears and doubts and all our sin, so that we would have forgiveness. By His death, He

crushed the head of the devil, to win the eternal victory over the gates of hell.

And He rose again the 3rd day to bring that victory, that forgiveness, that peace and joy to you, Dear Child of God. Which is news of great joy for us in this valley of the shadow of death. The devil and his minions are always seeking ways to infect, sicken, and kill off God's holy bride and her children of faith. Are you worried or concerned about all that the evil that the gates of hell are breaking loose in our world today?

Listen to the Lord your God. He says, "Listen to me! Fear, love, and trust in Me above all things. My righteousness draws near as I make you my child in the waters of Holy Baptism; as I speak My words of forgiveness, life, and salvation in your ears; as I feed you the life-giving body and blood of My Son; as I will come again and take you to myself in heaven, to live there forever and ever, without end.

It's scary out there. But, our family history shows us we are never alone. Christ is with us, and on Christ the solid Rock we stand.