

Let me ask a question of those of you of a certain age: Did you ever look around at a group of your peers and wondered to yourself if you look as old as they do?

I ask that because I heard of an older gentleman who was sitting in the reception room of a dentist's office. It was his first visit to see this dentist. While waiting for his appointment, he noticed a certificate hanging on a wall which bore the dentist's full name. Suddenly, he remembered that a slender, nice looking young woman with that name had been in his high school class some 50 years ago. **Upon seeing the dentist, however, he quickly discarded any such thought. This gray-haired lady with the deeply lined face was way too old to have been his classmate.** After she had examined his teeth, he mentioned a certain school and asked if by chance she had gone to that school. **"I sure did," she replied. "When did you graduate?" he asked.** She answered, "In 1965. Why do you ask?" "You were in my class!" he exclaimed. She squinted her eyes and looked at him real closely and then asked, **"What subject did you teach?"**

[We laugh to keep from crying, don't we?]

Our lesson for today from the book of Genesis begins like this: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, (that's pretty old, wouldn't you agree) the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'"

Ninety-nine years old! But this was not the first time that God asked something from Abram or Abraham, as we know him. It is said that Jewish history began with a command to Abraham which he received from God to leave the country in which he was born and to go "to the land I will show you." That happened in Genesis 12. Abraham believed God. God said, "Take up your family and go." Abraham went. **That was the kind of faith Abraham had. And it was that faith that gave birth to the nation of Israel.**

In today's lesson, God challenges Abraham's faith with even more of a fantastic promise. God tells Abraham that Sarah, his aging wife, will bear him a son. Remember he was 99 and Sarah was 89. Abraham laughed at first. Wouldn't you? He asked God how could it be that a woman of 90 and a man of 100 could become parents? But again, he believed God. Paul tells us that Abraham "hoped against hope" that the message was true. And Abraham moved forward with faith.

As we consider Abraham's example, we see **WHAT FAITH REALLY IS. FAITH IS... A DYNAMIC, FORWARD LOOKING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.** Faith is not sitting on your hands waiting for God to perform a miracle on your behalf. **FAITH IS... a matter of movement. It is a matter of achievement. It is a matter of reaching out for a miracle. It is a matter of obedience to God's commands.**

There is a humorous story about **Bob Zuppke, the colorful former Hall of Fame football coach at the University of Illinois.** Zuppke was trying to get his team prepared to play the University of Iowa. "Men," he roared, "I want you to get in there and die for Illinois. **Nobody will be taken out unless he's dead. Get that? Unless he's DEAD!**"

The inspired but overmatched Illinois team played Iowa to a standstill until late in the fourth quarter when they finally ran out of gas. In fact, one of the frail Illinois halfbacks literally keeled over from exhaustion. Zup grabbed one of his younger players and yelled, **"Get in there and replace that man!"** The youth with fear and trepidation dashed out to where the exhausted man lay—then came right back to the sidelines. "What's wrong?" shouted Zuppke. **"Why didn't you take that man's place like I told you?"** **"It ain't necessary, Coach,"** gulped the youngster. **"He's still breathing a little."** **Well, after all, he wasn't dead!** The young man had taken his coach's pep talk to heart, but he didn't follow his instructions. **Christ needs people today who will obey his instructions to love and to serve and to give.** We are not simply to be passive spectators. **We are to get into the game of life as warriors for Christ's kingdom.**

Many Christians miss this truth. For many, faith is a cautious, cloistered type of experience in which one seeks, first of all, not to ripple the waters. But that is faith in its weakest form. Faith involves risk. Faith involves moving out. Faith involves setting our eyes on a lofty goal.

In other words, there is such a thing as being too careful--WHEN WE WALK IN FAITH. We miss the exhilaration of life when we refuse to venture out, to do things on faith, to stretch for that which is beyond our grasp.

Someone else has commented on the fact that so many of our attitudes about life are expressed in cautious, negative terms. For instance, the weather person gives the weather and says, “Tomorrow there will be a 20% chance of rain.” He never says, “There will be an 80% chance of sunshine.”

When you are giving directions to somebody on the street, you will say, “Go down here to the third red light.” Fifty percent of the time that light is going to be green. However, we never say, “Go to the third green light.” Faith has a positive outlook. Faith is being willing to heed God’s command regardless of how daunting a task may be.

Abraham is an example of what FAITH IS ALL ABOUT!! Faith involves moving out. FAITH IS ABOUT SETTING OUR EYES ON A LOFTY GOAL! IT IS ABOUT THE RISK!!!

Here is the second thing to be said. **PEOPLE WITH THE “FAITH” OF ABRAHAM ARE THE ACHIEVERS IN THIS WORLD. People of faith are those who... champion our causes, who move humanity forward, who inspire the rest of us.**

Presbyterian pastor Stephen Janssen tells about Sir Alexander Fleming, a Scottish physician and microbiologist, who won the Nobel Prize for medicine when he discovered penicillin. As most of you are aware, Fleming made this discovery quite by accident. One day he happened to notice that the fungus on a certain glass plate had died when it came into contact with some mold that was on the same plate. Fleming was a very positive, forward-looking person who followed up on his observations. Most people would just wash off mold. We usually don’t see much good coming from mold that we find on something. **Out of curiosity, Fleming took a bit of the mold and cultured it for further study.**

Out of his work back in 1928 came what? That’s right—penicillin, the most widely used antibiotic in the world. The result—Alexander Fleming found a way to treat formerly severe and life-threatening illnesses such as pneumonia and meningitis.

“One observer commented that what impressed him about Fleming was that he immediately acted on his observation. Most of us, when we see something unusual, merely say ‘that’s interesting’ and do nothing about it. **We need to let God show us how to see the world’s difficulties, so that we might know what we can do about them.”**

It is important for us as Christian people to see that Christian faith is not a static, passive, non-threatening style of life.

JESUS WAS A “DOER.” He was a person who was so outspoken that he aroused envy, bitterness and hatred. If he were a quiet, nice little person sitting in the corner doing no harm, he would never have been crucified.

Somehow, though, the Christian faith is seen by many people as a style of life in which we are quiet, submissive people who never venture out, never trouble the waters, and subsequently never achieve great things. This is something of what Jesus meant when he said, *“the children of this world are wiser than the children of light.”* (Luke 16: 8)

Christian faith is a dynamic, forward looking relationship with God. **People of faith are the doers in this world, the achievers, those who enlarge our horizons.**

But there is one last thing to be said: THE GREATEST ACTS OF “FAITH” IN THIS WORLD INVOLVE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS.

You may be familiar with the name Philippe Petit. Petit is a French high-wire artist who gained fame when he walked a high-wire strung between the lofty towers of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris in 1971. Some of you may remember that, in 1974, he pulled off the same stunt with a high-wire walk stretched between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. As thousands watched below, Petit made seven crossings of a cable stretched 1,350 feet above the traffic and concrete of Manhattan—dancing, spinning, grinning, even lying down in the middle his lofty cable.

Even today Phillipe Petit is not afraid to take risks. In fact, he says that he does not see wire walking as risky. He has rehearsed his antics on the high wire so many times that he feels safe there.

There is one thing, however, that absolutely terrifies Phillipe Petit. **He says, “Some risks I find impossible to take—particularly personal risks with people—for example, marriage, or having children.”**

Did you get that? Getting married and having children are scarier to this wire-walker than crossing a tiny cable 1,350 feet in the air.

You and I take such relationships for granted. Maybe Petit's unusual fear will cause us to think about our relationships. What greater risk is there than trusting your life to another person until *"death do us part."* That is an enormous **"LEAP OF FAITH!"** Sometimes we are so gooey eyed with romance that we don't think through the implications of the step we are taking. If we did there would be far less divorces.

Then there is the risk of having children. There are some people who choose not to have children for a variety of reasons, and that's fine. But it would be sad if we chose that course simply because we are afraid to risk the hurt and the pain that are inevitable in all important relationships. After all, such relationships also bring great joy.

However, Phillipe Petit helps us to put life into perspective and to realize that these are the greatest risks—these common, ordinary events that most of us never analyze, never think through.

But there is a risk greater than any of the others. That is the leap of faith that Abraham took—A LEAP OF "FAITH" IN GOD!!

Sheila Cassidy in her book **Audacity to Believe**, tells of being arrested in Chile years ago on trumped up charges after leading a Revolutionary Movement. She was arrested and held without trial in a detention camp.

She was finally found guilty of a minor infraction but still was held in the detention camp. She was given by a doctor a copy of the New Testament. Leafing through it, she came to that passage in Romans 8 where Paul asks, *"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? NO!! In all of these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Sheila writes, **"Incredibly, in the midst of fear and loneliness, I was filled with joy, for I knew without any trace of doubt that God was with me, and that nothing they could do would change that."**

Perhaps you are a person who has always kept God at a distance—who has been reluctant to trust God with your life. Let me invite you to experience an exhilarating new adventure. **WHAT IS THAT ADVENTURE? "FAITH!"**

WHAT IS FAITH? Trusting in a daily relationship with God that moves you forward. **WHAT IS FAITH?** A tool that promises you that if you believe in it, believe in God you will achieve Great things, **WHAT IS FAITH?** An Act that promises to strengthen your Relationships with both God and others. **So my friends, TRUST IN YOUR "FAITH" before you TRUST IN THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD.**

WHY...."FAITH" PROMISES YOU THINGS THE WORLD CAN NEVER GIVE...WHAT DOES IT TRULY PROMISE? A FINAL WALK WITH GOD IN HEAVEN!! Amen.