

Getting It Done Faithfully

Genesis 15:1-6 and Luke 1:67-75 | Fifth Sunday After Pentecost | July 13, 2025 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

I've been feeling a bit of uneasiness the last few months as we anticipate a significant surgery for our son, Oliver, on Tuesday (**picture of Oliver**).

Without getting into a ton of detail, this is important for his quality of life and it's a risky procedure with an extended stay while he recovers.

I hadn't realized it, but apparently the stress meant I would become impatient and sometimes a bit crabby to be around.

At one point recently, it became clear that I needed to take a timeout. Go for a run and recharge because I was not fun to be around.

When I got back, I was asked if I was "feeling better, Betty White." (**slide of Betty White**)

This is code for the Betty White Super Bowl commercial where the actress, who recently died at the age of 99, is playing football—Betty is told to eat a Snickers (**BW with Snickers**)—and she'll feel better, back to herself. The tagline was "you're not you when you're hungry."

Now, I'm not sure a Snickers bar could truly turn grumpy Betty into happy Betty (**slide**), but getting a little break sure did wonders for me (**slide of my face**).

When I'm under stress, taking a moment to pray, getting outside, or even having a small snack can change my energy.

None of these things can fix the issue. I'm still nervous about what's coming up, but what I can control is my attitude and my way that I interact with others.

What I think this says, however, is how hard it is for me when I don't feel like I have control on what's happening. Waiting. Being patient. Trusting in the right outcome. That's HARD. I don't think I'm the only one who gets like that.

After the LORD makes a covenant with Abram, he's told to look to the heavens (**Abraham outside**) and count the stars. This is how many descendants you'll have—a limitless amount.

Sermon Transcript

And instead of saying, “wow, thanks a lot LORD, that’s awesome!”... he has a much different response.

“How is that possible? I’m old. My wife is old. We don’t have kids. How will there be any way for this to come true?”

If only Abram could’ve had a Snickers (**GIF of Snickers**)... maybe he wouldn’t have felt the need to keep trying to intervene and take matters into his own hands.

But it’s not that simple (**SLIDE of cartoon**). The web of decisions weaves through extreme subplots. What God has declared, man tries to manipulate. This is rarely a good combination.

As the narrative is told in Genesis, there are a lot of events that happen which threaten the promise of descendants. Many of those times are when Abram gets in the way.

Abram, on multiple occasions, marries off Sarah by saying she’s his sister. Did you know that he’s not actually lying—in Genesis 20, he confesses to King Abimelech that Sarah is actually his half-sister after the king is warned in a dream not to marry her—and this king wants to remain loyal to the integrity of his heart. Just because he CAN have Sarah as his wife, the king sends her back to Abraham. Then he rips into him. “Why have you done this to me?”

There are troublesome parts of the Biblical story when we actually focus on Abraham and Sarah. They don’t make the right choices most of the time. They often act on behalf of what they say God says. But God has to constantly redirect.

When the LORD says that Abraham and Sarah will have an heir, Sarah dismisses this and brings in her servant, Hagar, who becomes pregnant with Ishmael.

When the LORD makes promises, they immediately question and indeed LAUGH at God for how ridiculous those plans sound. When confronted with laughing, Sarah lies about it.

In order to be reminded of their doubts, the son they finally have is literally called “laughter”, Isaac.

After she has Isaac, Sarah no longer has time for Ishmael—he isn’t needed anymore, a true heir is born, so she doesn’t want Ishmael to inherit what belongs to her son. She tells Abraham to cast them out.

Sermon Transcript

But **the LORD** doesn't cast aside Ishmael. Abraham is told that a great nation will be made from the descendants of Ishmael.

In fact, the one time that Abraham is lifted up for doing the **RIGHT** thing is when he nearly sacrifices Isaac to the LORD before being told enough, don't do this.

Yet, it's perhaps this deep level of flawed characters that the story of Abraham and Sarah survived around the campfire for generation upon generation.

The LORD never says, "forget it, you two keep blowing it. I was wrong and I'm going to find someone else."

It might surprise us to know that, when Abraham dies—after having **SIX** more kids, mind you... that he is buried with his first wife, Sarah.

At the burial cave is not just Isaac. It's Isaac **AND** Ishmael.

While our Hebrew Bible will now focus on the lineage of Isaac, and we'll hear about the sons born to Rebekah next week, we must not be quick to judge that Ishmael was unwanted, left to fend for himself, or that he was an enemy.

It's hard to read the chapters of Genesis 12 to 25 and wonder why God picked Abraham and Sarah. They aren't always likable characters.

As ELCA pastor Cory Driver writes,

"The patriarchal narratives of Genesis are more than just the stories we may be familiar with from Sunday School. Instead, they are complex and highly nuanced depictions of an extended family struggling in relationship with God and with one another. By reading these stories as a series of traumatic events that the protagonists survive and overcome, modern readers, especially survivors, can draw strength for our own journeys."

Translation?

Families are hard. Relationships are hard. Sibling rivalries and dealing with in-laws. Making decisions, including ones about people we disagree with, can be challenging. And it's timeless. All of that is part of our human story. And it goes back to the beginning of storytelling about our faith.

Adam Grant spoke with former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern (**SLIDE**) about the challenges she faced making decisions as a leader.

Sermon Transcript

She talked about the struggles she had in making decisions because she chose to always lead with empathy. When talking about a horrific incident in her country, she said that there's a feeling of "what can I do?" and she recognized that through her leadership, she could do something about it.

She then pondered what that meant. She said, "I suppose you might have to pay the price for making that decision, but you're willing to pay."

Grant added some psychological framework to what she described. He said, "let's not talk about compassion fatigue. It's not compassion that drains you. It's being empathetic to stress. It's the feeling of hurting for someone else but not being able to help."

So to borrow Deacon Steve Arnold's phrase from last week, "so what?"

Are these ancient Bible stories relevant to us? I think so. We see characters placed in unforgiving situations and trying to make the best of their situation.

Yet, when the world groans in grief and pain, it's not always easy to respond.

Sometimes it's easier to: **skip it. Procrastinate. Let someone else try. Pretend I don't know. Don't give my full effort. Resent what I'm being asked to do. Criticize others for not doing it the right way.**

Can you relate? It's that feeling of hurting for someone and not being able to help.

Maybe a Snickers bar would help (**image**). Or maybe this is when our faith carries us (**SLIDE of Faith**). The faith that Abraham and Sarah relied on with the LORD. The faith that Jesus spoke of, the size of a mustard seed. The faith that the first apostles relied on when nobody believed them and wanted them dead.

We are confronted with choices. Each and every day. What's right in front of us? Who is being affected? What can we do when we're stuck and are helpless to help?

Faith isn't about getting everything perfect. It's about being faithful to God. We won't be alone. We won't be abandoned. We can make mistakes because we're freed by our sins from a loving God who trusts us, even when we do the wrong thing.

Sermon Transcript

We might feel the fatigue. But know that this is when we rely on each other. Our faith, together, will help us face whatever is in front of us. Amen