

Sermon for the 11th Sunday after Pentecost (C), Proper 14, 5.viii.2007, 08:30 / 10:00
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist – Missa Brevis / Service of the Word
Genesis 15:1-6; Psalm 33:12-22 ; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 ; Luke 12:32-40

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and Who
is to come! ✠Amen.

**"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen."**

-- Hebrews 11:1

God calls His people to live in *hope*, not to dread. Beginning with
Abram, this hope is based on God's own *promise*, a promise that
includes every generation to come.

It is this 'nation' that the Psalmist cheers on in today's Psalm of
thanksgiving, "Happy the nation whose God is the LORD; happy
the people chosen to be God's heritage!" Faith, the writer of
Hebrews proclaims, is the assurance of the hope that we are that

people, God's people, doing God's purpose as that has been revealed in Jesus Christ. It is that *faith* which connects us to our ancestors in God's Covenant people, not blood, not the accident of birthplace or family. In today's Gospel, Our Lord points us toward an expectant, hope-filled way of living, a faith directed toward the future, like house-hold servants, ready at any moment for their master to arrive home.

But, isn't the future unsure? Aren't some of those things not yet seen likely to be things we would rather *not* see? Don't those servants in Jesus' parable need to worry, as we do, about what is to come? These are questions we cannot keep from asking, the more so the longer we live. Look what calamities befall others! Look what we ourselves have suffered? Is the world better or *worse* than when we were first aware of it? How can anyone look with hope into the future? How can a small congregation

with declining membership in an out-of-the-way place like this believe in God's promises with the faith of Abram?

The God we meet in the Bible and in the Church's prayer and teaching answers all of these questions, but not in the way we expect. As Abram would learn, and after him Isaac, and then Jacob, Joseph and all the Patriarchs of Israel would come to understand, the God Who *called* Abram out of his civilized existence and created a covenant people of wandering faith is also the God Who is *with* that people, by their side as they face foes of overwhelming strength, entering with them into exile and persecution, the fourth mysterious figure in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace, and, unnoticed by most, crushed with them on a Roman cross. And with those who still expected and expect His coming, I believe He was with them through the terrible future of the Diaspora, through pogroms and death camps in which hope itself seemed to have no place, and beyond that nightmare with

them still in the struggle to live and to return to the land of God's promise toward which all Jewish history points.

To us also, who are not of that land, who are not of that people, God issues a different sort of call at just that point where the Jewish and Gentile worlds intersect, the cross at the crossroads of the world. Being born into our life and plunging into our death and hell itself, God's Anointed rises to reveal to us what it means to be human *and* a child of God, what it is to have a *gracious*, heavenly Father. Sons and daughters of Israel and those who never were, are called together toward a new future with hope for the whole human race, for the whole world. Few in number, and always easy to abuse, to kill and to crush here and there, our forebears in hope-filled faith entered the future gladly and generously, with hearts assured. They found assurance of that hope in the very Name of God, 'Immanuel'/'God-with-us,' 'Jesus'/'He will save His people,' 'Savior,' 'Redeemer,' 'Father.'

‘Son,’ loving and life-giving ‘Holy Spirit.’ Most of the generations of the Church before us had nothing *but* the Divine Name in which to trust. It was enough, more than enough.

Do we demand more? Well, we certainly *have* it. We have security and protection of the law to worship and to peacefully serve our neighbor and community and world. We have money and land and buildings in common and more besides. If we quiet our worried minds by *faith*, if we steward what we have in *hope*, with the generosity of the God Who loves us and has blessed us so richly, much, much more will be added to that, blessings much more than things, *lives* welcomed into this family of faith, welcomed by *us*, a *living* future of praise before God’s face!

✠Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to Our God and

Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✎Amen.

S. D. G.!