

**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**  
**Second Sunday in Lent**  
**February 24 - February 25, 2024**  
**Pastor Scott Klimke**

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Romans 4:13-25

Mark 8:31-38

I recently heard a song that claims heroes and heroines are scarcer than they've ever been. When our reading from Romans was written, St. Paul might have been attempting to fight off a similar lament as Jewish and non-Jewish Christians struggled to come together as one and to embrace the new thing God was up to in the Church of Jesus Christ. As any Jew would expect and like, Paul identifies Abraham as a hero in our second reading today. But quite unexpectedly, Paul's argument ends up being that Abraham is a hero not because he embraced circumcision at God's command, but because he believed God when God promised Abraham and Sarah would give birth to a child long after that ship had seemingly sailed far away. In offering this point, Paul demonstrated that Jewish Christians missing former heroes like Abraham were now surrounded by more would-be heroes and heroines than ever thanks to the faith of Abraham that lived on in all the non-Jewish Christians they were now meeting. And it seems to me that this is an ancient observation which is still quite relevant today. As we live in a changing world and do our best to remain receptive to the new things God is still prone to do, let's never forget we meet a would-be hero or heroine in every person of Christian faith we have the privilege to meet.

This is because like our second reading other scriptures teach that faith is in fact a heroic virtue. For its part, Hebrews memorably describes faith as the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things unseen and then gives us a crash course on all the faith-filled heroes and

heroines to be found in Israel's history. The same biblical book also calls Jesus the pioneer of our salvation as well as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. And what do pioneers do? In faith, pioneers blaze new trails. They go where no one has gone before. Possibility is their compass and the horizon their map of home. It does all add up to faith being the mark of a hero or a heroine and helps us to see that faith traffics in possibilities rather than being kept home by preconceived dangers and limitations. Even so, let's not undersell heroism and the faith that makes it possible.

Concerning Abraham, the truth is Paul overdoes it in our reading from Romans. Contrary to what Paul once wrote, the Abraham we meet in Scripture is not always strong and unwavering in his faith in the promises of God. One chapter after Abraham believes God shall use the womb of Sarah to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, he takes matters into his own hands and has a child not with Sarah, but with a servant named Hagar. A chapter later and the very verse after today's reading from Genesis ends, Abraham laughs when God again promises that Sarah in her old age shall give birth. And for her part, Sarah herself busts out in laughter a chapter later when she hears the same promise repeated. When it comes to faith, this is how it goes with us. As Martin Luther was prone to say, we're all both saint and sinner; sometimes too wary and afraid to get out of the gate and on other occasions more ready to traffic and travel in possibilities. And this certainly does have something to say about whether heroes and heroines are scarcer than ever.

If heroes and heroines are marked off as such by the consistency and the tenacity and the reliability of their faith, I'm afraid we've only had one hero worthy of the description and that's Jesus. As today's reading from Mark reminds us, when Peter was landlocked by limitation, Jesus pressed on to the cross; trusting and trafficking in the possibility that goodness is stronger than

evil and love more never-ending than death. And because in his faith without faith or fatigue, Jesus did prove worthy to be called our hero, every person with the Holy Spirit's gift of faith in him now has the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. And maybe these gifts, which will one day free us forever from all the limitations and dangers we have ever known, can inspire us to trust and to traffic in possibilities a little more ourselves.

If this is to happen, we'll have to fight back against wistful nostalgia in favor of hope, faith, and optimism and I know this can become more difficult the longer we live in a world where death and decay are still at work. Today I wonder if the kind of neighborhood that was common when I was growing up will ever come back again. I once knew all my neighbors by name, and they all knew me by name. We participated in each other's lives and did things with one another regularly. At the party my parents held on the day of my confirmation, I remember family from far and wide breaking bread with some of our neighbors whom my parents had made a point of inviting. These neighbors didn't go to our church and in fact, one of the couples belonged to a nearby Wisconsin Synod congregation and another of the couples was Roman Catholic, but it didn't matter. Unlike so many people today, we dared to believe in the possibility that what joined us together was more important than our differences. With what might as well be battle lines and barbed wire separating so many neighbors today, I do deeply miss the former days when it more often felt like being neighbors together, a community together, a country together, and even sometimes a world together came first, and I do worry nothing similar is on the way any time soon. And each person here today almost certainly has their own version of this longing and despair and wistfulness. Too much water has gone under the dam for us in a world that's still deeply broken for it to be otherwise. And yet, with the gift of faith in that pioneering

hero who is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit calls us forward; calls us to travel out of limitation and into possibility.

If formerly dear friends have died or moved away, let's live in the possibility that new friends who will become dear over time can still be made here at church. When leaders come and go as they do everywhere, whether they be lay or ordained or consecrated, let's trust in the promise of God that new faces and new voices and new personalities shall bring their spiritual gifts beneficial to shared life as the people of God. And if we can't find anything like the neighborhoods of the past in the neighborhoods of our present, let's live in the possibility that something similar might be found in one of the neighborhood groups now active again at American Lutheran Church.

Brothers and sisters, I've been approached in the past week by at least six different people who want me to say more about neighborhood groups and other opportunities for belonging and community within the life of this congregation. I take this to mean there's a growing thirst for community and connection. What I hear is a growing desire for the Church to be the Church; God's superior alternative to what the status quo has to offer. And I'm happy to report on the progress we are making in this regard.

This past Wednesday Julia and I were quite busy. I got my mom here for the music at 4, but I told her she'd have to fend for herself until worship at 6. After the music was over, and having no ticket for the meal to follow, my mom decided to pass the time by sitting on a bench near the door of the fellowship hall. Not knowing who she was, a member took it upon himself to make an introduction, get my mom to a table with other people, and ensure she got fed. Thank you! It's a sign of progress we shouldn't overlook or diminish; particularly when we remember a year ago, during my first week here, a visitor eating at the same table as me during Wednesday

Night Alive made sure to point out to me how a man was very visibly being ignored at a nearby table even as he was surrounded by other people. But what didn't happen a year ago, did happen this year and that's what matters. In, by, and through the Holy Spirit, let's keep it up. Let's live in the faith and the possibility that new connections and communities of great value can be formed here at American Lutheran Church no matter the time or the season. Let's live in the faith and the possibility that we can more and more be what the Church is supposed to be; God's superior alternative to what the status quo has to offer. Amen!