

Genesis 15:1-6.

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." 2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
God renews his promises.

1. He is our shield.
2. He is our very great reward.

What a joyous celebration we had last week! Easter is easily the high point of the Christian Church year. With great gusto we sang Alleluia once again. We recalled the great victory our Savior has won for us through his death and resurrection. Jesus has defeated sin. He has left death in the dust! He has given us power over the devil! He has given us heaven! With voices united we proclaimed his victory! With voices bursting with individual joy we sang I know that my Redeemer lives. He lives and I shall conquer death! He lives my mansion to prepare! He lives to bring me safely there! And on top of that joy, on top of that victory, many of us were also able to surround ourselves with family and friends. What a wonderful and special gift Easter is!

But now what? Certainly I don't think it is a stretch to say that there is a little bit of let down after Easter. Family has headed home. We pick up the regular routine again, and as much as we appreciate our regular routine, it may lack the buzz and excitement that came with Easter. As we move away from Easter morning we may even waiver in our confidence concerning some of the truths that we sang about just a week ago.

On Easter we rejoiced in the fellowship of the church and found strength in numbers but now we go back to a world in which we might feel outnumbered. We go back to a world where the scales seem to be tipping evermore in favor of those who oppose our Biblical values. Just one week ago we sang of victory, but our lives do not suddenly feel or look more victorious. All our problems didn't suddenly dry up just because Easter came. We were indeed refreshed by the good news of Easter, but now perhaps we find ourselves swimming against the a steady stream of personal

challenges and a world full of turmoil. Living in a culture that seems to constantly sing the tune of “what have you done for me lately”, even though we are still so close to the joy of Easter we may be pressured by this world and by our flesh to say, “Ok, God now what?”

This is what God does for us now. God renews his promises. God speaks to us through his word and come to us through the sacraments and he renews his promises. He reminds of us his presence and his love and protection. He reminds us and assures of us of the blessings that he pours out upon us. What a precious gift is the Word which tells us that the Lord is our shield. He is our very great reward!

In our lesson for today Abram had just celebrated a tremendous victory. Abram had left his comfortable home in the prosperous city of Ur and was headed toward the land God had promised to him. On his way he had come across danger and turmoil in this new land. Several area kings had been at war with each other and some enemy forces from the East seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, including Abram’s nephew Lot and all of Lot’s family. When Abram heard that his dear relative had been taken captive he put together a relatively small force of 318 fighting men from among his servants and went to rescue his nephew. He went to war with these kings and their forces and Abram was victorious. Abram recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, He brought back the women and the children and the servants. So few against so many, yet Abram was victorious. The Lord had granted him a marvelous victory.

It seemed like Abram was on top of the world. The kings of the area came out to meet him. The kings praised him and blessed him. They offered him the plunder and the spoils of the victory, but Abram divided up the spoils with these kings and those who went to war with him while hardly keeping any for himself. He trusted that God would be the one to make him rich not some earthly king.

What a wonderful victory for Abram. He had saved his nephew. He had gained respect and honor among the kings of the area. This was all from the hand of God and Abram recognized that God had blessed him graciously and abundantly. But still there was a bit of a letdown even after this great victory. After all, his problems didn’t all just suddenly disappear. Even if the Lord would give him more victories like this one there would still be one glaring problem. He still had no heir. Abram was still without the child that God had promised. There was still no son to whom Abram could pass down this inheritance. God could sense this was on Abram’s heart so God came to Abram in a vision and spoke these words of assurance to him. ***“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”***

We can tell by Abram’s reaction to this vision and these words of God that the victory was bittersweet as long as he had no son. He knows God has blessed him, but what he wanted most he did not have. *“What can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is some foreign slave. You called me from my*

home to go to this unknown place, I have followed your instruction, I am out here walking, but I am still walking alone. I have no son. All these blessings that you have poured out upon me will go to someone else. They will go to some servant and I will have no connection to the Savior.”

Abram was trying to reconcile what he saw around him, what he saw in his life, with the unseen promises of God. He was blessed but not in the way that he wanted or expected. That is something that we struggle with too. We are blessed by God. We rejoice in his love. We rejoice in forgiveness and salvation. We know that God is our shield and our great reward. But when trouble and pain pierce us, when we feel the sharp stabbing pain of disappointment and sickness and sorrow we might wonder why? God tells us that we are victorious but it doesn't feel like it. It doesn't look like it. How often we are left flattened by a stampede of personal problem! How often our beliefs are trampled upon and we feel defeated and outnumbered! God tells us that he is our very great reward and yet when the wicked in this life are the ones that seem to prosper.

As human beings we would prefer to have visible and obvious results. As men and women who live in a tangible world we would prefer to have consistent and overwhelming tangible proof that God is with us and that he loves us. As human beings we struggle to reconcile what we see in our lives, the struggles, the pain, the turmoil, with the unseen promises of God. So now what? What does God do to calm our troubled hearts and assure us of all the blessings we have through him?

This is what he did for Abram. After Abram vocalized his confusion and frustration, the LORD spoke to his friend. The word of the Lord came to Abram and God said, ***“This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.”*** God addressed Abram's fears, renewed his promise, and then God took Abram outside and said to him. ***“Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”*** God spoke to Abram's heart. He renewed his promises. He used the sight of his wonderful creation to remind Abram of his power and glory and Abram believed. “I who put the stars in the sky have the power to give you a son. I will make this happen.”

The Hebrew word for believe here is related to our word for Amen. Abram was reassured of God's promises and it was as if Abram simply said Amen. Abram trusted in God and we are told ***it was credited to him as righteousness.*** God's Word strengthened and maintained Abram's faith. God saved Abram through the faith that he gave him.

It's not complicated or terribly impressive, but it works. God's Word has power to save us. God's Word and sacraments create and strengthens our faith, and our faith in God's promises is what saves us. And so God maintains that faith. He speaks to our hearts. He renews his promises. He strengthens our faith. Our faith is based on our God's gracious promises.

God can do what he promises to do. Each day we live in and among and his marvelous creation. During the day we live under the warmth of his sun. During the night we can look up in to sky and see the stars sparkling so high above us. Our God created this and he who created the stars in all their splendor; he who arranged them in the heavens and keeps them in their place promises to take care of us and protect us. He promises to guide us through this life and take us to our home above in heaven. And if this all powerful God promises that he will be our shield he will be. He will keep us from all harm and evil that would destroy us.

As we think about the bad things that happen to us and the bad things around us, perhaps we should also consider for a moment that which doesn't happen to us. God protects us and keeps us from all sorts of physical and spiritual harm that we are completely unaware of, and the trouble that he does allow to touch our lives he uses for his good purpose. He uses it to strengthen us and bring us closer to him. He has saved us and brought us to himself. We are his because of his grace and our Lord in that same kindness guards and keeps us in the faith. He is our shield. We can be confident in his care. We can be certain of his promises.

God would reward Abram's faith. Even in his old age God would send a son to Abram and Sarai. And through that son he would bless many nations. The Savior of the world would come through his descendants. This of course is the source of our greatest reward as well. The Bible records the story of how God kept his promise of Savior. This is something that Abram didn't even have, but we have. We have God's word written down for us. We have the Bible. We have eyewitness accounts that tell us how God brought about his plan of salvation. This plan of salvation is a story that will be told and retold as long as the stars are in the sky. The very God who created the heavens came down to this earth to save us. In love he lived for us, he died for us, he burst forth from the grave for us. Our faithful God did all of this just as he had promised to give us victory. He did this all according to the Scriptures so that we might have full forgiveness. He did this so that he could led us through this world where we see so much pain and trouble and then deliver us to the perfect paradise of heaven. It will be a place where we will see and know and feel the richness of his great reward in full. There we will know God's promises not just by faith but also by sight. We will have our full inheritance as his children and we will reach the land that he has promised to us.

Until then we live by faith. Until that glorious day, let us trust in God. Let us hear his promises and simply say Amen. This is the faith that God gave to Abram. This is the faith that God gives to us. This is the faith that saves us. It is a faith built not on our works or our feelings, but it is based on his promise and is nourished by Word and Sacrament. And today, once again, those promises are renewed to you. God is with you to guide you through life and eternal victory is yours through faith in Jesus Christ. "God is your shield. He is your very great reward." And to that we simply say, Amen.