

9<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY after PENTECOST

August 7, 2022

**COLLECT:** GRANT TO US, LORD we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

**THE LESSONS:** First Lesson: Genesis 15:1-6

Psalm: 13:12-22

Second Lesson: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Gospel: Like 12:32-40

**THE SERMON:** Many Bible scholars say that Noah and Abraham were the most faithful to God. Because of man's disobedience, God flooded the earth and started all over. He washed away all mankind except the righteous man Noah and his family. God warned and prepared Noah for the event of the flood and afterwards he repopulated the earth with the descendant of Noah. This has some similarities to God's dealing with Abraham.

Abraham was a herdsman, but he always tried to do what was right. God spoke to Abraham in visions and there is the suggestion that God appeared in person to Abraham. Now the Jewish faith taught that if you looked at God you would die, but it was not so with Abraham, he lived.

Let's look at the story of God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The story says that God came to earth to see for himself if these two towns were as wicked as he had heard. One day three men stopped by

Abraham's tent and Abraham offered them water, food and a place to rest. Some biblical scholars say the three individuals were angels. Some say the three men were God and two angels.

There is agreement that after Abraham had entertained them and they resumed their trip to Sodom and Gomorrah, God pondered whether to tell Abraham where he was going and why. The scriptures say that God spoke to Abraham. He told him he was on his way to Sodom and Gomorrah. He had come to see if these towns were as wicked as he had heard, if so, he was going to destroy them.

Abraham asked God if he was going to destroy the righteous along with the wicked. He very quickly asked, suppose there are righteous men there will you spare the towns for their sake. Abraham knowing how wicked the towns really were began to bargain with God. He asked if you find 50 righteous men there will you spare the town. God said he would spare the town if he found 50 righteous men there. Abraham continued to bargain asking that if 40, 30, 20 then if 10 righteous men were found would God spare the towns for the sake of the righteous men. Each time God said he would spare the town if that number of righteous men were found.

Here like in the story of Noah, God tells Abraham what he is going to do and, because of Abraham's faithfulness, he allows Abraham to bargain with him.

Abraham had been faithful to God, but there was one thing he wanted that God had not allowed to happen. Sarah, his wife was barren and had not borne him a son. So, Abraham thought sons he had fathered from slave women would inherit his possessions.

Although they were beyond child bearing age, God promised Abram that Sarah would bear him a son. Sarah and Abraham thought this was impossible, but it did happen.

In a vision God also promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore and stars in the sky. That, he, Abraham would be the father of nations. And indeed, Abraham is venerated by the Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Moslem faiths.

Through the stories of Noah and Abraham we as Christians should know that God hears our prayers and if we are faithful, he may call upon us to do his work.

The message from the Gospel is that we should always be ready to do the work of God. We are told to be dressed for action. You may have heard it said as: Be ready to roll. We don't know the hour nor the day that our lives will end. It is hoped that our most treasured possession is a good spiritual belief and relationship with God and not the amount of material goods we have acquired,

Doing the work of God takes commitment, it can require long hours, some pain, some losses even among gains. You may know the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat. There are heroes among us, even today. People who have dedicated themselves to helping and loving others.

Our diocese, our town has lost a hero. I once wrote an article in our newsletter We Are Called in which I described Deacon Bonnie Polley as the Mother Teresa of Las Vegas. She was a consummate person for getting involved in the lives of people in trouble and helping them out. She did not shirk from any situation in which help was needed. She was

instrumental in securing child care for children with and HIV/AIDS. That was Reach Out. She was an inspiration for Las Vegas having a shelter for women and children. That was Shade Tree. She was also involved in establishing the halfway house, Parson's Place, for those recently released from prison. She was active in Cursillo and prison ministries.

Bonnie was so active in so many things, she was a Deacon's Deacon. She was the arm of the Episcopal Church out there, throughout Las Vegas. Her faith was evident and she worked tirelessly to make life better for others.

I would say she was like Abraham, her faith allowed her to reach out to all people not knowing who they were but asking God to consider their plight. Hers were truly the hands and soul of God at work in our church and this community.

This is one person I truly believe is going into that building not built by hands, but her faith and belief in God.

Rest in Peace Bonnie. Amen.

Rev. Lionel Starkes

God.