

## CARRYING OUR FAITH

*Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our creator, and the holy spirit who blesses us with steadfast faith. Amen.*

Think for a moment, and try to conjure up a memory of a time in your life that most required faith. Maybe it was a single moment, event, or crossroads that necessitated a leap of faith. Or maybe it was a period that required you to keep faith over a stretch of time in the faith of adversity.

Think of that memory. Think of that experience. And hold onto it.

Personally, I'd like to say that I have all sorts of courageous stories of leaps of faith. But I'd be lying if I did. I actually have a vivid memory of a conversation with one of my friends in high school, where I went into great detail laying out an analogy about just how averse I was to taking those sorts of leaps of faith. I likened it to standing on a dock in a river, and wanting to know exactly where my foot would land before I left my place of safety.

Ironically, for as much as I remember the conversation, I have no idea what leap of faith I might have been avoiding at the time.

But today, in our first reading from Genesis we hear the story of Abram and Sarai not just leaping with faith, but carrying it. Carrying their faith in such a way that their story inspired people of faith for generations. Inspired even the Apostle Paul enough that he referenced them in his letter to the Romans as an example of great righteousness through faith.

But in order to really grasp the gravity of their faithfulness, it's probably necessary to consider more of the big picture than what we hear today.

You see, from the very first moment that God spoke to Abram, at the tender young age of 75, God challenged him with a leap of faith, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." But along with that challenge, came a promise, God says, "I will make of you a great nation."

Now, for years, Abram and Sarai followed the will of God. Abram built altars to the Lord as they traveled the countryside. And again and again, even as he grew up older, even as they had no legitimate heir, God reassured Abram, "do not be afraid," "look toward heaven and count the stars, so shall your descendants be."

When he's 99 years old, the promise is stated again, which we hear in today's reading. And eventually, in chapter 21, Sarai whose God-given name is now Sarah, gives birth to Isaac. But not before Abraham has to bear witness to the corruption and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

And even when Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac is finally born, God tests Abraham's faith by commanding him to sacrifice the very same son that they had so faithfully waited to see the birth of.

Even though Abraham's story begins with a *leap* of faith, leaving his homeland and everything he knew to follow God, I think it very quickly becomes a story of *steadfast* faith. Of carrying his faith through the ups and downs up life, and allowing that same faith to carry him when he needed it the most.

And I think Abraham shares that in common with Jesus' disciples. For so many of them, that first moment in which they chose to follow him, leaving behind their former lives and everything they knew, that was a leap of faith.

But in today's Gospel, in the words of Jesus, we seem to be hearing that a single, solitary, leap of faith is not enough. He tells them that bad days are ahead, that he will suffer at the hands of the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. And that in order to truly be his followers, that they will have to deny themselves, that they will have to take up their own crosses and follow him on that path of suffering.

And even though he doesn't quite directly say it, to me, this sounds like a warning, an encouragement that you'll need more than a few moments of courageous faith to get through the days ahead. You'll need to carry your faith with you, to have *steadfast* faith.

It takes faith to deny oneself. It takes great faith to bear a cross in Christ's name. But that's exactly what the disciples did, they carried their faith with them, and allowed it to carry them.

Often, taking a *leap of faith* is more about yourself, about whether or not you can summon the courage necessary to do whatever the thing you're trying to do is. But carrying your faith, having steadfast faith is not so much about you, as much as it is about the thing, or more specifically, the God in whom you place your faith.

Think back to that memory of a moment requiring great faith... Was it really a "leap" of faith? I'd be willing to guess that if you really think about it, you can see the ways that God prepared your faith ahead of time, and helped you to sustain that faith afterward. I'd bet that you actually carried your faith with you.

Maybe I'm a scaredy cat for not being ready to take more leaps of faith, but I'd much rather aspire to have the sort of faith that carried Abraham and Sarah through those late years of their life, trusting that God would fulfill God's promise. I'd rather have the faith that carried the disciples through the suffering of their Lord, that allowed them to set aside their own wants, and needs, and desires, in order to fully serve all God's children.

It takes faith to keep pushing on, to keep serving others, to follow the teachings of a countercultural rabbi like Jesus. But that faith, that steadfast faith is exactly what the Holy Spirit gives to each one of us. It's ours to carry along on the journey toward the cross, with the full knowledge that there will be days where it's not us carrying our faith, but rather our faith carrying us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.