

Today I'm proclaiming good news from God's word

- That as we hear the promises of God in Christ Jesus
- And as we receive them in trust
- God grows us in relationship with himself
- And brings us into his future
- Into his life.

Promise, Trust, and the Future: the example of marriage

- A young couple, their life ahead of them
- Solemn vows each other
- The words of the Lord Jesus: What God has joined together...
- Received in trust
- Does it shield them from suffering?
- Or mean that everything will be smooth?
- No; but as they both trust they walk together into a future
- Created by God
- By the same God who justifies the ungodly
- Who brings life to the dead
- Who gives the gift of the resurrection of the body.

Today we are hearing about our father in the faith: Abraham

- We are hearing about the promises that he received from God,
- And his trust in the promises
- And the way God reckoned that trust as righteousness:
- The way that God brought Abraham
- Into the future that he was creating

Let's go back a bit

- From a grand focus, from creation to tower of babel
- We focus down on one human being: Abram
- 'Abram' means something like 'exalted father; In chapter 17
- It will be changed to Abraham, meaning, 'Father of many nations'
- But as the narrative starts, in chapter 12, this is what we hear: **Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'** Genesis 12:1-3
- A great one-sided promise from God to Abram.
- This sets the scene for the chapters that follow
- But by the time we get to chapter 15,
- Where Melchizedek blesses Abram,
- It seems that God is nowhere nearer
- To making Abram a great nation
- It's then we read the words from today's Genesis reading: **After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'**
- 'Do not be afraid' – the same words in today's Gospel reading...
- So Abram is again reassured by God
- But what is still lacking from Abram's point of view
- Is *fulfillment* of the promise.
- Listen to Abram's response: **But Abram said, 'O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?'**
- You might think that is clear enough to make the point
- But it goes on: **And Abram said, 'You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.'**
- So on the one hand there's the promise of God

- And there is the trust that Abram has already exhibited
- But there seems to be no *action* on God's part.

Think about this perhaps in relation to your own life:

- You have heard God's promises, you have trusted them,
- But the fruit of holiness does not seem to be growing.
- *We can feel like giving up.*
- But from Scripture we know that to maintain faith
- We need to hear promises from God,
- And that is what happens in today's reading.
- God does not upbraid Abram for his question, for his complaint,
- Rather, he makes his promise clear in words and actions.

First, we hear the words:

- **But the word of the LORD came to [Abram], 'This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.'**
- The lack of a child has not nullified God's promise
- He has not gone back on his word.
- God then gives him a visual encouragement: **[God] brought [Abram] outside and said, 'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.'** Then he said to him, **'So shall your descendants be.'**
- Have you ever been in the countryside on a moonless night?
- Remember what it's like: this is what Abram sees.
- Abram hears the words, and sees the stars, and he believes.
- This is what the word says: And [Abram] believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.
- The Lord received Abram as a person in good standing with him,
- He brought Abram into the future that he was creating.

This last verse of today's reading is a key quote in the New Testament.

- St Paul quotes it especially when he wants to make clear
- That we do not come into a good relationship with God
- By what we can do, but simply by receiving in trust
- What God has done for us.
- So in Romans 4 we read: **What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.**
- Listen to what St Paul writes later in the chapter: **Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him', were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.**
- We will be reckoned right with God,
- We will be brought into the future that God is establishing.

There is scholarly opinion is that Abram expressed his assent

- To the renewed promise of God by his use of the word 'Amen'
- -At least such a word was evidently used in treaties of the time
- By those assenting to covenant conditions.
- Amen: a word that expresses trust
- It brings us into the here and now: it focusses us on the promise
- And it brings us into the future that God creates
- An example: 'Amen' with the absolution
- 'Amen' with communion
- Faith in the promises of God brings us into the kingdom
- Where God reigns.