

# The Eighth Sunday after Trinity (Proper 14)

Genesis 15.1—6

Hebrews 11.1—3, 8-16

Luke 12.32—40

Faith is sometimes presented as necessarily divorced from evidence. If you can prove something, then you don't need to have faith to believe it. But that doesn't seem to be quite what our readings today are saying. They seem to suggest that faith is not an irrational decision to step out into the darkness, but something chosen and calculated on the basis of what is already known and experienced. Faith still has a strong element of risk and uncertainty, but it isn't just plain stupidity.

Abram's venture of faith starts in conversation with God. Those of us who have read Genesis have already had the chance to get to know God a little. We have seen him creating the world, saving Noah and so on. So when, in Genesis 12, the Lord comes to Abram, Abram is already embedded in a story. We are not told about Abram's upbringing, but we are given the list of his ancestors, and his descent from Noah, so we are to understand that the Lord is already known to Abram, at least as part of his heritage. By today's reading in Genesis 15, Abram has tested that initial rather impersonal knowledge a good deal. He has left his land and followed God's promise. So the conversation we overhear has a history to it.

But although things have worked out quite well for Abram, so far, in his dealings with God, that does not make his faith blind. This central thing that God has promised, which is so dear to Abram's heart, but which is also an integral part of the plan that God has outlined to Abram, has yet to happen. Abram still has no heir. But a son is what Abram is really interested in. That was what made it worth taking the risk. The flocks and the wealth are nice, but they are not what he is here for. He doesn't know quite why his son should be vital to God's purposes, too, but he knows that it is so, and that is what binds him to God — they both want and need this one thing.

So when he stands talking to God under the starry night sky, his faith is a complex mixture of what has already gone before and what he longs for. And we are told that God reckons this to him as righteousness (v. 6). This curious combination of knowing and longing is to be the saving of Abram.

The Hebrews commentary on the story of Abram makes faith the air that Christians must breathe to live. Like Abram, Christians are part of an ongoing story. They come in on a conversation that is already taking place, in which something of the character of the main speaker is already evident. So they are not starting from nothing. And, like Abraham, they are aware that their story, too, will have consequences for those who follow. Hebrews writes that the patriarchs do not see the completion of God's plan, though they see enough to be able to guess, and be excited (v. 13). And they understand enough to be able to live their lives in such

a way that they can help generations to come to play their part in their turn. They, like Abraham, live with this mixture of knowing God through what he has already done, and longing to see what is still unknown. Part of what they bequeath to generations to come is that discontent, that restless certainty that what you already know about God and his ways is never enough. Desire and discontent are strange qualities to value, but apparently they are what make God willing to be identified with us, 'not ashamed' to be our God, Hebrews says (v. 16).

So we are beginning to build up a picture of faith. It is based in a knowledge of God, but it is fuelled by longing to know him better, and to see more of what our faithful but enthralling God is up to. What we know for sure is that we have not yet got to the end of what he has in store for us. So faith is about excitement, based on what we have already experienced, not dogged persistence against all evidence.

Luke's story of the waiting servants adds to this feeling of pleasurable tension. These servants know their master, but they also know that he is unpredictable. Not an easy master, then, not one you can please by just doing your ordinary tasks routinely. But if you are prepared to put up with his ways, what fun you will have. Do you know any other master who will come and, laughing, serve you a feast himself in the middle of the night?

*Jane Williams  
from "Lectionary Reflections"*

### Prayer

Almighty Lord and everlasting God,  
we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern both our hearts and bodies  
in the ways of your laws and the works of your commandments;  
that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever,  
we may be preserved in body and soul;  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen.