

"The Wish of Man or the Word of God?"
Genesis 15:1-6

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

25 June Anno Domini 2000
The 470th Anniversary of
The Presentation of the Augsburg Confession

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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Only true God - in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Many of you are able to recall that pagan, new age ditty ...

Star light, star bright,
First star I see tonight.
Wish I may, wish I might,
Have this wish I wish tonight.

And who is not able to sing that song taught to us for the last six decades by the cockroach's tuxedoed cousin who warbles ...

When you wish upon a star,
Makes no difference who you are,
When you wish upon a star,
Your dreams come true.

What great promises there are in wishing and what great disappointments follow as wish after wish goes unfulfilled. Wishing is like buying a lottery ticket ... one involves the sinful stewardship and focus of one's mind while the other is the sinful stewardship of one's resources. For someone to make a wish for himself is hardly the same as having a blessing. A young girl might wish for a wedding with Prince Charming only to end up married to just an ordinary guy or even worse, in the opposite of her original wish, to someone who abuses her. Wishing is not the same as having a blessing. The reason? Simply this, wishing for nice things, even good things, is hardly the same as having a blessing because of the uncertainty of having what you wished for.

For someone to wish that another person might have this or that is not the same as making it happen. It is easy to say, "I wish that grandma's Alzheimer disease would go away and she would be the way she was and remember me and do all the things with me that she once did." But it doesn't happen,

does it? People become sad at such thoughts, especially as the years pass. Grandma gets worse. The granddaughter grows older.

Wishes originate within our hearts and wishing focuses on what we think is the best, the way life ought to be and the way one wants it to be. As such, wishes can be awfully depressing and produce disappointments that evolve into growing doubts about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In the Old Testament Reading for today, Abram was not especially filled with joy at the events of his life, particularly one empty spot ... that of a son. Abram, whom we know more by the name Abraham, had been promised by the Lord God that He would bring forth a great nation from Abram and that in Abram all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12) through Abram's Offspring (Gal. 3:16) Who is the Christ of God. This Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) would be from the seed of Abram. Yet he was without a son. Still, he remains faithful to the promise of God. But waiting is difficult. Abram continues to go about his life. He rescues his nephew Lot and meets the King of Peace. This King of Righteousness brings out bread and wine to Abram. Then we come to the Old Testament Reading for today. Please listen to that text once again and consider whether you want to base your faith on the ...

... Wish of Man or Word of God?

After these things the Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram, I am your Shield, your exceedingly great Reward." But Abram said, Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" And behold, the Word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Thus far the inspired and inerrant Word of the Lord our God.

The Word of the Lord came to Abram. What comfort this ought to be for you. The Word of the Lord came to Abram because the Lord God knew exactly what fears and questions go on in the minds, hearts and souls of His people. You are sinning if you think, "I wish God knew what I was going through. I wish He were here. I wish He knew what dying was all about." The Word of God tells us that the Lord knows your fears, your hurts and your pains ... not just from a point of view of having a detached knowledge of them, but from actually experiencing them. Great drops of sweat and blood poured forth from Him as He felt the awful abandonment of man and God. He experienced the pain and anguish of body and soul when He suffered and died on the cross in your place.

After these things the Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Fear not, Abram." Though He doesn't initially refer to Abram's specific dilemma, the Lord knew exactly what plagued Abram's days and haunted his nights, and God told him, "Fear not. Do not be afraid. My Word is sure and certain. Nothing will stand in My way of My Word. Fear not, Abram, I am your Shield, your exceedingly great Reward." God will sustain Abram and be the greatest Reward that the faithful man could ever be given.

But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" The Lord permits Abram to voice his concerned thoughts and to speak about the promise of God's Word and the status of Abram's life. "Lord, how is this going to work out since I am without a son and therefore without the promised Seed of the woman. Will the Savior be descended from Sarai and me? We have no son, You know. Or will He a descendant from my house but not from me? Will it be Eliezer of Damascus. Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

And behold, the Word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Here the Lord God Almighty reminds one of His own that His Word shall accomplish His purpose. The promise is sure and certain even though it seems impossible to man that it could ever take place. Think about such impossibilities from our limited human perspective: the creation of the universe in six days, all the animals in Noah's Ark during the worldwide flood, the Incarnation of the Lord God, the Atonement for all sins of all people of all times when Jesus died on the cross, the Resurrection of the Christ, the Resurrection of the dead in Baptism, that the Holy Spirit works through the Word to grant you the gift of faith in Christ, the forgiveness of your sins in the absolution, the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar, that the Lord knows every hurt, fear and pain of your body, soul and spirit, that He is with you always to the end of the age, that He will never leave you nor forsake you, that the Lord is preparing a place for you in Paradise and will take you to be with Him.

Apart from faith, man views these historic events as absurd (thus denying God and His attributes) or impossible (thus imagining such things are more than could possibly hoped for or even dared to wish for). Both limit God. Both place the wish of man over the Word of God. However, others, like you, believe the promises of God given by the Word of the Lord ... and they do so despite the fact that they may not be seeing it at the moment, despite the impossibility, despite what human reason deduces, senses suggest and emotions evoke.

Then the Lord brought Abram outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." This is not the first time that Abram had received this promise. Earlier God had declared, I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16). Beholding the dust of the earth is an activity done during the daytime. What about at night ... when the trolls of doubts arise and the thoughts of man are darker? "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." Don't wish upon a star. Rather, count your blessings, if you are able. Don't engage in the fruitless pursuit of searching for Aladdin's Lamp with its diabolical three wishes. Behold instead, the cup of blessing which we bless. Is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? (1 Cor. 10:16). "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." The Psalmist confesses, I remember Your Name in the night, O Lord (Psalm 119:55) and at midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments (62).

Abram believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. Abraham saw Jesus' day and rejoiced and was glad (John 8:56). The Lord ... credited it to him (Abram) for righteousness. That, dear people, is the promise of God for the salvation of all those who believe ... salvation by the grace of God through faith in Christ as the Redeemer from of old. Isaac believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Moses trusted the Lord God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Shiphrah, Puah, Ruth and Esther believed in Yahweh and it was credited to them as righteousness. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak

and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets (Hebrews 11:32). Paul believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. So did Timothy, Ignatius and Polycarp. The truth of this Good News came to a wretched man named Martin Luther. By the grace of God, he believed the Lord God and it was reckoned to Luther as righteousness.

Can you not behold that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Abraham has become a blessing to the nations, and that God's promise for the Savior was fulfilled in Christ and that God's promise that Abraham would be the Father of many is being fulfilled each time He works faith in the heart of an unbeliever? The Apostle Paul wrote that the adoption as sons of God is by the same grace and faith that God bestowed on Abraham, so that we are also sons of Abraham, who is the father of us all (Romans 4:16).

We are sons of Abraham, not because of who Abraham was, but because we believe what he believed. We are Lutherans, not because of who Luther was, but because we believe, teach and confess the same dogma and doctrine that he did and does. It was 470 years ago today that our forefathers in the faith and our spiritual fathers in the church, both clergy and laity, prepared and delivered the Augsburg Confession. The heart and soul of that confession of the faith is Article IV on Justification ...

"It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for His sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness."

This is the Gospel ... the Good News of God in Christ. Thus, I will not say, "I wish you would believe this" for this would be a man's expression of desire. Imagine a pastor making a hospital visit with a man with terminal cancer and saying, "I wish you healing of your body today." It's the equivalent of saying "Have a nice day." I wish you no such thing. Rather, hear the Good News, "I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." These words are not the wish of man but the Word of God and they have the power to convey exactly what is declared unto you, ... for you who believe. Amen? ... As you believe, even so it is unto you. Amen.