Topic: Legacy (Season of Lent 2, Lectionary C)
Scripture: Psalm 27, Genesis 15:1-12/17-18, Philippians 3:17-4:1
Hymns: BB483 Lead On, O King, vu101 Songs of Thankfulness, vu279 Faith of our Fathers, vu660 How Firm a Foundation

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Let’s take a moment to pray…

Lord, before this world's days even began, your Word was in the beginning, and it was with you and it was you. The mystery of that brings us to our knees. Yet today you allow us to open your Word and know you better. So, we ask that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Give us hearts open to your Spirit as we seek you. AMEN.

(SLIDE) Genesis 15 begins with Abram and the Lord coming together for a conversation. God says to Abram "**Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward**". We might brush this off this morning as easy to understand. The Lord IS our reward. No material gain in this world can equal what the Lord is to us. (SLIDE) Perfect... Wrap it up... Whoever is on lunch get the coffee started!

(SLIDE) (ASK) But did anyone here this morning read Genesis 14 before coming to church today? No?! Ah, then maybe we need to dig in a bit... hold the coffee. In Genesis 14, five kings come together against four other kings in the land... two of those being kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. The five kings win the day... and Lot, Abram's nephew, was taken captive.

Abram, upon hearing his relative was taken prisoner, came to Lot's rescue with 318 trained fighters. Upon his victory, the king of Sodom approached Abram and offered him a tenth of all the spoils of the victory. Abram responds, "**I will accept nothing**". Since when? Dude, with 318 armed guys you just solved what four kings and their armies couldn't! You have to want SOMETHING.

Abram is a very broken man, you see. (ASK) Did anyone read Genesis 12 before coming to church this morning? Ah... ok. In Genesis 12, when God calls Abram to task, Abram is promised offspring and land - you know the promise, don't you? Children as numerous as the stars in the sky, and a Promised Land. Yet, years later on the day of Lot's rescue when the King of Sodom offers Abram the spoils... Abram has no heir, no offspring, and no land.

And Abram reminds God of this when the two talk together here in chapter 15. (SLIDE) "**What can you give me since I remain childless [...] You have given me no children; so a servant in my house will be my heir**".

Abram sees himself as an empty divine vessel. He has no need for the King of Sodom to make him rich, or for the accolades afforded him by the High priest Malchizidek, because all Abram wants is the heirs that were promised to him. All those goods, all that gold, all that fame does no good if there's no one carry on the tradition.

Abram is consumed by his childlessness, to borrow from 1 Corinthians 13:2, he sees through a glass darkly.

The problem for Abram is bigger than his childlessness, and it is a problem that spans many in Scripture. The Israelites enslaved in Egypt cry out to the Lord for freedom, they "groan under their bondage" and cry out for help.

The Psalmists penned it well, writing, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget us forever?". The Prophets, too, encounter it as they contemplate the iniquities of Israel wondering when she will be made clean, whole, and triumphant once again. They all trace their way back to Abram's complaint...

(SLIDE of) "O Lord, you have promised righteousness and blessing, but..." (PAUSE) But wickedness and suffering prevail. God, you have promised, but how long can I endure the delay of fulfillment? Even Revelation ends with a similar lament, "**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus**" as if to express a yearning for the final triumph of Christ in a present reality that seems unpromising.

That reality is the reality we live in each day: The depressing headlines of the news - more dead, more fighting, more unrest; the statistics that tell us suicide is on the rise, that homelessness is getting worse, the economy is swirling a narrowing drain; the good life is getting further and further away.

Where are the good works, we ask? Where are the children that faith produces?! As we struggle and fight against sinful habits, we can easily picture ourselves in Abram's position. We look at our lives and the barenness of our faith and we lament, "What good is the promise in Christ? Truly, Abram speaks for us, we say: God, you've not delivered on your promise".

So, what do we do when we feel like the divine promise has borne no fruit?

(SLIDE) James, as in the writer of the Book of James, addresses this feeling as it relates to faith and works. The new life in Christ is given to the baptized and is a "good and perfect gift from above" he writes in the first chapter. There is no question that the source of righteousness is God alone.

So, the faithful are like Abram in that Abram was blessed because he was called, not the other way around. In a primary sense the good things of God come from above... God elects... and the promised future is real. Just as God promises Abram descendents - a legacy in his flesh - so also God promises righteousness in the flesh to the servants of Christ.

Just as Abram expects a child, we... the faithful... should expect our faith to give birth to good works. The divine Word is in you and me, as James puts it, and it causes us to be doers of the word, not just hearers.

But we might react to the feeling that the divine promise hasn't borne fruit by defaulting to the world's practices to force fulfillment. If God hasn't seen fit to make my way forward, I guess the world will. Abram shows us the folly of this.

After Abram laments to God about the promise not being fulfilled, that he is childless and that nothing will fill that void, Abram says these words, "**You have given me no children; so a servant in my house will be my heir**".

That's the worldly solution, even to this day. If you do not have any blood relative to be your heir, like a child, or you do not name one through a will, all you have dissolves to the state. In Abram's case, his servant will get everything Abram has. (ASK) You want to know what God says to Abram in response? God says plainly (EM) "NOU"... "**That man will not be your heir**".

If you're feeling like God's promsie hasn't come through, you have to look back to the source of the promise for guidance. God reminds Abram just who made the promise in every sense of what that means.

Abram looks to God, "You promised me". And God looks back, "Yea. You dead yet?" Abram (look around), shyly responds, "Well, no..." God says, "Well then I've got some time left, don't I? Get back to doing good things out there"

But Abram has turned to human ways, the world's ways, and it is a foreshadowing of what happens with Sarah later down the line. When the divine promise STILL has yet to be fulfilled, Sarah conspires with Abram to force an heir with her servant, Hagar. (ASK) And you remember what happened when they did that, right? (EM) Ohhh it was a disaster...

The way forward when we feel that the divine promise has borne no fruit cannot depend on our own actions, pious or as justified as we try to make them out to be. We cannot use the world's prinicples to try to force God into fulfilling what He has promised us. It is for the Lord alone to bring HIS promises to life!

Throughout Genesis, both Abram and Sarai struggle to see their future in the promise of God. Both of them try to force their place in that promise, and both are denied. Abram is told that his servant, Eliezer, will not be his heir.

Sarah and Abram both try to force an heir through Hagar with disastrous consequences, and thus God turns the pair back. And then when God reveals that their heir would come through an elder and barren Sarah, the pair laugh. They are blind to the way forward.

So, too, for us today we may need to walk a long way in "hope for what we do not see" while "we wait for" the inheritance of those in Christ "with patience" (SLIDE Romans 8:25). This is why it is so important that you be in the Scriptures, especially if you're a person given to hopelessness or despair or depression or anxiety because God's time and our time aren't the same thing.

Even as Abram walked by faith he kept asking "When God, when God... When God?". God has to keep reminding him. God does not deny him a spiritual form of insight and assurance about the future. God keeps reminding Abram of the promise, it is Abram who is impatient - not God.

So God directs Abram to a sacrifice to help get his mind off his impatience... a heifer, a goat, a ram, and doves. Seems mundane. Seems harmless. Abram does the deed and falls asleep and God reveals to him the significance of the sacrifice, and it this...

The sacrifice of the animals is the nation of Israel - Abram's promised children and descendants. The birds of prey that come to try to feast on the sacrifice Abram made represent Pharaoh and Egypt enslaving Abram's descendants. Abram drives the birds away to protect the sacrifice, just as God said that the nation would never be completely crushed.

The heifer, the goat, the ram, the doves - four animals represrnting the 400 years of affliction as slaves in Egypt from the end of Genesis to the opening verse of Exodus. The doves represent the escape from Egypt, Israel's flight to the Promised Land.

Not only will I give you children, Abram, but I'm going to tell you what will happen to them, to them and their children's children, and their children's children's children. That's how you know my promise is good, Abram. I've written a future for them.

And it all happens exactly as God said it would. So for us, who sit in our present day lamenting that God has forgotten us... that He hasn't come through for us... we can see God completes His promises through reading the Scriptures. He's already foretold our future, He has written it in His holy word.

If you're feeling like the divine promises are ringing hollow, you have to get back to the Word. You have to get back to reading the history of your ancestors in the faith. You have to see where we've been to know where you're going... God is there, both in the past as He weaves the fate of us all... and in the future, waiting for you to catch up to Him.

Get into the Word. Get in there and find God... say it with Samuel "Here I am, Lord!". And you're going to see things change.

AMEN