

**+ Genesis 15:1-6 + The Resurrection Life: Believing, Though Not Seeing +  
+ 2nd Sunday of Easter + 12 April 2015 +**

**Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!**

“P, E, Z, O, L, C, F, T, D.” If you can read that line at the bottom of an eye chart, you have perfect 20/20 vision. You don’t need glasses. Your eyes focus properly. So how well do you see? If you don’t see well, it can mean lots of problems. Whether it’s noticing an oncoming wall or clearly seeing signs on the highway, good eyesight is very important!

...But eyes can only see so much. No matter how perfect your vision, your eyes can still deceive you. I’m not talking about illusions here, but your eyes can actually deceive you into doubting what your almighty God is able to do. That’s where a different pair of eyes comes into play—the “eyes” of faith. This morning we’re going to get our “faith-sight” checked as we learn about the life we now have because of Christ’s death and resurrection. Even if you have amazing “faith-sight,” doubt can still cloud your “eyes.” That’s why we need the Lord to show us that the Resurrection life in Christ is **BELIEVING, THOUGH NOT SEEING.**

For a man who was 85 years old, Abram’s actual eyesight was pretty good in spite of living the life of a nomad in the desert. He was married to Sarai, who was 75 years old. They had never been able to have children.

About ten years before, the Lord had called Abram to leave his father’s family in the bustling merchant city of Haran and travel down to the land of Canaan along the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The Lord had also promised that Abram and Sarai would have a child. In Canaan the Lord richly blessed them with flocks and herds, tended by hundreds of servants. They were very wealthy by any standard, but they still had no children.

Abram’s flocks and herds became so great that the land could not support them and those of his nephew Lot. So Abram offered his nephew the option to choose the pasturelands he wanted. Not surprisingly, Lot chose the more fertile, well-watered plans, leaving Abram with dry, dusty wilderness. Nevertheless, the Lord blessed Abram with more wealth, but still no children.

Soon after that a war broke out. Lot and many others were carried off by the victors. When Abram heard about it, he formed an army of 318 of his own trained men born to his servants. In spite of overwhelming odds, the Lord provided protection and victory as Abram’s army routed four great kings and their armies in one fell swoop. Abram rescued all who were taken captive and all the spoils taken. He gave 1/10 of the spoils to the Lord and returned the rest to their rightful owners. Abram knew who had given him the victory and every other blessing—a knowledge far greater than any spoils of war.

Yet after all this, Abram still felt troubled. Ten years had passed since the Lord had promised an heir to Abram and Sarai, but they still had no children. Doubt started to cloud Abram’s “sight.” So the Lord in his grace came to Abram and said, **“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield.** Remember your battle against the eastern kings? I protected you, and **[I am] your very great reward.** You could’ve had the spoils of war, but you knew that my friendship, my generous love for you meant more than mere trophies. I’ve given you more than you could have ever imagined. Have I not promised to make you great? There’s no need to be so worried!”

The Lord had fulfilled his promises of protection and material blessing. He had made it clear to Abram that the land in which he wandered would one day belong to his descendants, but Abram wondered, “Where are they?”

The Lord’s promises were always intimate and powerful. So Abram’s response is a little surprising, but how many of us have ever responded to God’s promises like this, “Yes, Lord, but...”? When Abram expressed his concerns to the Lord, they tumbled from his lips. In spite of the Lord’s clear and fulfilled promises, Abram’s doubt gave him trouble seeing if the Lord would keep that last promise. **“O Lord God, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? ...You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.** Lord, it’s been 10 years and what else can you give me if you don’t give me a child? I’m 85! My wife isn’t going to have kids anytime soon! If things don’t change, we’re going to have to give everything to my servant when we die.”

Doubt can blur the “faith-sight” of the most faithful believer. Frustrated, even accusing words flowed from Abram’s lips, but God doesn’t respond with the wrath we expect. No, he responded with grace. He challenged Abram’s trust, which was weak, but still there, and answered with gracious kindness.

The Lord took Abram outside his tent, made him look up at the sky, and told him, “Don’t even bother with Eliezer. **Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be.** Your offspring will be your own flesh and blood—a son of your own, and through the One who put the stars in the sky, you will have even more descendants than you can count.” What a promise of grace for an old believer and his barren wife!

With that object lesson, the Lord refocused Abram’s “eyes” of faith to see what his physical eyes could not. With unclouded “faith-sight,” Abram saw every one of those stars as another blessing of God’s grace—another fulfillment of the Lord’s promise. It would start with his son Isaac, who wouldn’t be born for another 14 years when Abram would be 99! Abram would have to wait to see the fulfillment of God’s promise, but the Lord had refocused his eyes on promises fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled. So **“Abram believed the LORD, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”**

The Apostle Paul explains this in Romans 4:(19-21), **“Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead...and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but...gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”** Through faith in his Savior, Abram believed, though he did not see.

Abram’s trust wasn’t based on feelings or on reason, but on the only sure foundation for faith—God’s gracious promise. The Lord had created that faith in Abram’s heart and through it gave Abram a right standing with God, not by what he had done or by some decision, but because of what Abram’s great Descendant, Jesus, would one day do for him.

You see, Jesus would shine brighter than any other star in the heavens as the Son of God and the promised Savior. Jesus would live a perfect life free from doubt in his Father’s promises and would fulfill the greatest promise of all—to be the payment price for all sin. Through faith in this unseen Savior to come, God declared Abram holy in his sight.

Such a beautiful account, but how has the Lord kept his promises to you? Purely because of his grace, he has made you a spiritual descendant of Abram through faith in Christ Jesus—a faith he planted in your heart through the waters of Holy Baptism connected with the powerful Good News that Jesus lived, died, and rose again for you! Since he made you his child through faith, he has never left your side, even when you’ve doubted his love. Jesus has forgiven your sins and worked all things for your eternal good, even when everything seemed against you. A look back on your life will show that Jesus has been your Shield and your very great Reward.

...But doubt has clouded your eyes in the past, hasn’t it? Have you ever found yourself wondering if the Lord can really do what he has promised as you hope against hope for a loved one dying physically or spiritually or when the money just isn’t there to pay the bills or the bottom seems to drop out in life? Have you ever felt like those fearful disciples hiding behind locked doors forgetting Christ’s promises that he will prevail? Have you ever found yourself staring up at the sky and wondering if the Lord will ever help you while completely forgetting that he’s actually answered you in his Word?

For such doubt in God’s promises, he should strike us down with his wrath, but that’s not how Jesus responds. “Look at the stars in the sky and count them if you can. See grace upon grace, blessing upon blessing. See life and care and strength. Recall each promise I’ve made to you in my Word. Test me and see if I will not open my hands of blessing for you—the open hands pierced for the forgiveness of all your sins. Be still and know that I am God, who guides all things for your good and see what I am able to do. I gave my life for you and took it back up again. Stop doubting and believe!”

Faith focuses outside itself on the One who is unseen who often does what is unseen. The Lord provides ample opportunities for you to trust him with your future—not to gamble with it, but to trust the Lord and his promises with your future and even that of your congregation.

By faith, you can take those fears for yourself and your loved ones, for your finances or hurting relationships and place them in the hands of the One who graciously guides all things for your good. To do that takes trust in the Lord and his promises. As a congregation, we’re moving forward with the largest building project this congregation has even seen in 40 years of grace. Not knowing what the Lord has in store, that takes trust in the Lord and his promises. So with clear “eyes” of faith, how will you respond?

You could see only the worst-case scenarios—woe, failure and collapse. You could try to deceive yourself with the power of positive thinking—hoping something good will happen. Or you could find certainty in the sure

promises of God in his Word, in his Supper, and in the remembrance of your Baptism. You could let the Lord refocus your “faith-sight” on his sure promises and then trust that he will fulfill them, for he is a God who acts in gracious mercy. “Look to the sky and count the stars if you can. I put them there. I brought life to a dead womb. I brought life to your dead soul. I have never left your side. I even came back from the dead! Why would I abandon you now? I will fulfill every one of my promises to you. So trust them. Trust me. Stop doubting and believe!”

So we respond with simple, childlike trust in God’s promises fulfilled for us. Like Abram, we see blessing and grace in Christ. Like Abram, by faith created not by reason or merit or decision, but by God’s grace, we believe, though we do not see. By faith, we are made righteous in God’s sight. One day we’ll even see the final promise fulfilled—eternal life with Jesus. Abram saw that and by faith in Christ, we will see that unseen glory someday too. May God grant us eyes of faith that are ever fixed on him and his promises. Amen. **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!**