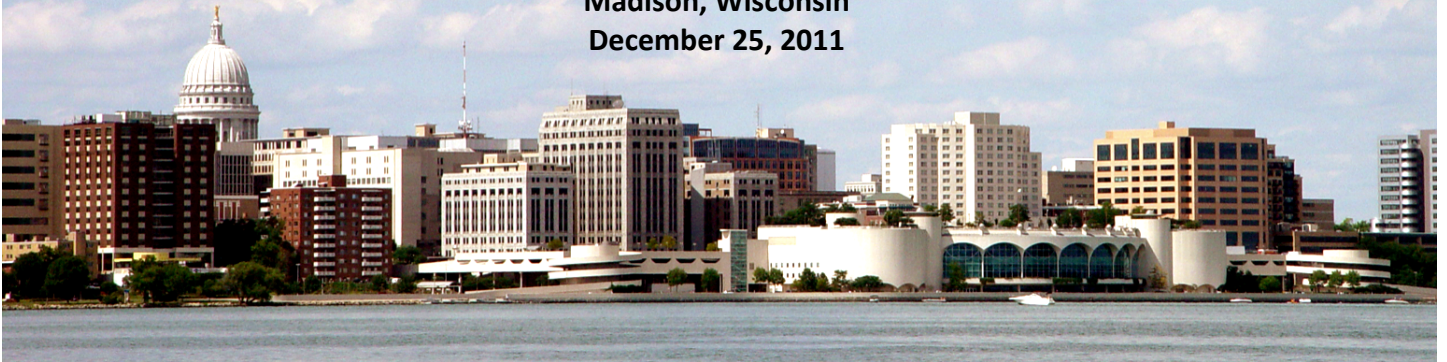


“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”

EXODUS 3:1-6; LUKE 20:27-40

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
December 25, 2011**



As most of you know, over the past few weeks we have been looking together at some of our spiritual heritage by considering the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We started three weeks ago, of course, by looking at Abraham, and certainly the most famous scene from the life of Abraham was the time when he was commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar. We learned that God did this in order to test Abraham's faith. We learned that Abraham passed the test, and then we learned that God blessed him not only by providing a ram as a last-minute substitution, but also by renewing the covenant, the promise that God would bless all the nations of the earth through one of Abraham's descendants, which, of course, was a reference to the future coming of Jesus. We then studied some of the amazing parallels between the sacrifice of Isaac and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Two weeks ago, we continued by looking at a turning point in the life of Abraham's son, Isaac. We discovered that Isaac faced some serious challenges, we learned that Isaac was incredibly patient throughout that process, we learned that he turned out to be a great blessing to his neighbors, and then we learned that, like his father, Isaac turned out to be a worshipper of God, as his father's faith became his own. We learned that Isaac was not necessarily a hero, there was no huge defining act of sacrifice, he did not go out in a faithful blaze of glory, but he was a regular guy, like many of us here this morning. His neighbors filled in his wells, and he just kept on redigging those wells. Isaac could dig! Isaac stuck with it over the long haul and kept on doing what he needed to do.

And then last week, we looked together at the life of Jacob. We learned that Jacob's life was rather twisted, to say the least. He was born just a few seconds after his older brother Esau, but as he was born, he came out with a firm grip on his brother's heel, and that was the opening shot in a long and turbulent relationship. Later on, Jacob would eventually trick Esau into getting the birthright, the main blessing from their father, and the bulk of the inheritance. However, Esau (as we can imagine) was quite angry and vowed to hunt down and kill his brother. Well, as Jacob ran for his life, as he was maybe only one or two days into a 450-mile journey, he sets up camp for the night, he uses a rock for a pillow, and he has the most amazing dream. In that dream, God appeared to him at the top of a ladder reaching into heaven. We learned that Jacob seemed to be rather surprised that God was not just a local god, but rather, he learned that God is everywhere. God, therefore, grabbed Jacob's attention, and Jacob responded by setting up an altar. At that point, Jacob's faith started to develop, and it would continue to grow stronger for the rest of his life. The dream of a ladder or stairway to

heaven, therefore, is not just the name of one of the greatest and most requested rock songs of all time, but it was a turning point in Jacob's life. And then, at the close of our lesson last week, we considered the fact that Jesus used this image to describe Himself, and we came away with the main idea that Jesus opened up a passageway to heaven through His birth, and life, and death, and resurrection, and ascension back into heaven.

This morning I would like for us to conclude this brief series by looking together at two main passages where God is referred to as being the **"God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."** Now that we know who these men really are, let us consider how God used their lives as examples in future generations.

I. The first time God refers to Himself as being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is found in Exodus 3 as we come to the beginning of the ministry of a man by the name of Moses (p. 90).

Most of us know that Moses was born to Jewish slaves in Egypt, but that Pharaoh had ordered all of the Jewish baby boys to be murdered as they were born. Moses' mother, however, refused to kill her own son. He was then placed in a little boat on the Nile River, where he was quickly picked up and raised by none other than Pharaoh's daughter. Over the next 40 years, Moses received the finest Egyptian education and training, but one day he saw one of his fellow Hebrews being tormented by one of the slave masters. At that point Moses looked both ways to make sure no one was looking, and then he killed the Egyptian. Word got out, though, and Moses had to flee to the land of Midian to work as a shepherd. He did that for the next 40 years of his life, and then one day when he was 80 years old, he was out in the middle of nowhere watching the sheep and minding his own business, when suddenly a nearby bush bursts into flames, but as he watches the fire, he realizes that the bush is not being consumed. If you will, please look with me at Exodus 3:1-6, and let us please pay special attention to how God identifies Himself after a silence of roughly 400 years,

1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

There is so much we could discuss here, but what I would like for us to notice is that after nearly 400 years, God makes first contact with Moses, and out of all of the ways that God could have identified Himself here, he chooses to identify Himself as **"...the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."** We might think about this almost in terms of a résumé. God was saying: This is who I am! And we need to realize here that Moses was living in a society with gods for just about everything. We remember the situation back in Egypt, especially, the land where Moses grew up. The Egyptians had sun gods, and river gods, and war gods, and crop gods, and cattle gods, and on and on and on. So, when God comes on the scene and talks to Moses, He makes a connection with the past. In a sense, God was listing His references. It is almost as if God is saying:

- Do you remember Abraham, the old man who left his home and traveled for hundreds of miles because I told him to? I'm his God! Do you remember the man who was promised a son in his old age?

Do you remember how he had a son at the age of 100? I'm his God! Do you remember how I told him to sacrifice his son, and how he obeyed, and how I provided a ram at the very last second? I'm his God!

- Do you remember Isaac, and how an angel was sent to help him find a wife? Do you remember how Isaac patiently endured mistreatment, and yet how he eventually became a great blessing to his neighbors? I am his God!
- Do you remember Jacob, the deceiver, the man who tricked his father and his brother out of the birthright? Do you remember how Jacob ran for his life and then had the dream about the stairway to heaven? I am his God! Do you remember how Jacob went from being on the run to being one of the wealthiest men in the world at that time? That was me! I did that!

And so as we look at what God was saying to Moses here, I think we see that God was making a connection with the past. God was saying to Moses: Moses, you are a part of this! I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I am also YOUR God! I have worked with THEM in the past, and now I am working with YOU! And that seems to be the main idea in this passage for us, that we are a part of this story as well. God is inviting us in. God is saying: I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...and I am also the God of YOU! You are a part of this!

And when we think about Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, we realize that all of us can probably find at least some way to identify with these people. All of us can say, "Yeah, I'm a little bit like him." We realize that these three men are about as different as three men can be—Abraham was a man of adventure, a man of travel, a risk-taker, a pioneer, a wealthy, powerful man. Isaac, on the other hand, was basically unknown, we might refer to him as being blue-collar, regular. Isaac was used by his family; deceived by his own son. But God is the God of Isaac just as much as he is the God of Abraham. And then we have Jacob, a mamma's boy, a man who loved hanging out at home, a man who hung out in the tent, a man who loved to cook, a man who lived a life of trickery and deceit, a thief, a man on the run for his life. Jacob, however, had a change of heart and slowly matured in the faith. It is interesting, then, that God can work with all kinds of people. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And just as they were like us in many ways, so also God can be our God. We are a part of this story.

And what these three men ultimately had in common was their faith. They were not perfect, but they were faithful to God. And so, just like we sometimes say that we can learn something about a person by the people they hang out with, so also we can learn something about God by the people He hangs out with. God associated Himself with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That tells us something not just about these three men, but it also tells us something about God. In fact, when we get to Hebrews 11:16, the Bible refers to these men and says, ***"But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them." "God is not ashamed to be called their God."*** That is an amazing statement! And we are part of it!

When God made the promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, we are a part of that promise. When God said that through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed, we are now receiving the blessings of that promise. Another way of saying this would be to say that Abraham is our spiritual father. That is why Paul referred (in Romans 4:16) to ***"those who are of the faith of Abraham,"*** and then he described Abraham as being ***"the father of us all."*** Abraham is our father! The point here is that we are a part of this story. And whenever we face challenges to our faith, it helps keep things in perspective to remember what men like Abraham went through. When the teacher says, "I will fail you if you don't skip

church this week,” we think of Abraham being called by God to leave home at the age of 75, not even knowing where he was going, and suddenly our little problem at school doesn’t seem too bad. And the same could be said of financial challenges, and health issues, and family trouble—we have an amazing spiritual heritage, and knowing what our spiritual ancestors have gone through should be of some encouragement to us. As the Bible says in Hebrews 12 (right after listing all of these heroes of faith), **“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”** So, first of all, we find God referring to being the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, as a way of bringing Moses up to speed, as a way of bringing Moses into the story, and the same can be said of us. We are also a part of God’s story.

II. There is a second major event where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are referred to in the Scriptures, and it comes in the New Testament, in Luke 20 (p. 1621).

In fact, in Luke 20, Jesus quotes the passage from Exodus as He answers a ridiculous hypothetical question from the Sadducees. As we look at Luke 20, it is interesting to notice that it is a chapter full of challenges. Up at the beginning, the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders all come up and challenge Jesus to explain His authority. In other words: Who gave you permission to teach? Who gave you your preaching license? And Jesus responded with a question of his own, **“...tell Me: Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?”** Well, they discussed it among themselves and figured they couldn’t say **“from heaven,”** or else He would ask them why they hadn’t been baptized yet, and they couldn’t say **“from men,”** because they were afraid of the people, because most of the common people believed that John was a prophet. So, they answered Jesus that they did not know where John’s authority came from, and Jesus said, **“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”** He shut them down on that issue.

Then, notice what happens in verse 19 (of Luke 20): The scribes and the chief priests wanted to go hands-on with the Lord, but they were still afraid of the people, so they sent spies, men who pretended to be sincere, so that they could catch the Lord in something He said, to get the Lord in trouble. So, they watched Him for a while, and then they asked, **“Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?”** Well, Jesus could see where that was coming from. There was a division among the people. Most Jews were irate that they had to pay taxes to Rome, but there was no way Jesus could tell them not to pay their taxes, otherwise, He would be guilty of insurrection in the eyes of Rome. So, in verse 24, Jesus had someone show Him a denarius (the coin that was equal to a day’s wage, if we could imagine maybe a \$100 coin today), and the Lord said, **“Whose likeness and inscription does [this coin] have?”** They said, **“Caesar’s.”** And the Lord said, **“Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”** Again, the Lord shut them down. They could not argue with that answer!

But in our passage we have a challenge from yet another group, the Sadducees. The Sadducees were in charge of the Jewish priesthood, but by this point in history they were basically nothing more than a political party. Among other things, the Sadducees only felt that the first five books of the Bible were binding on the Jewish people. With this by way of background, let us please look together at Luke 20:27-40,

27 Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), 28 and they questioned Him, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife, and he is childless, his brother should marry the wife and raise up children to his brother. 29 Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died childless; 30 and the second 31 and the third married her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. 32 Finally the woman died also. 33 In the resurrection therefore, which one’s wife

will she be? For all seven had married her.” 34 Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; 36 for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 38 Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him.” 39 Some of the scribes answered and said, “Teacher, You have spoken well.” 40 For they did not have courage to question Him any longer about anything.

As we look back at the challenge, I think we can see that these people were not at all interested in getting a real answer to their question. And I think we all know people like this, people who have no interest in what we have to say; but rather, they are only interested in arguing. They are only interested in picking a fight. That is what is happening here. There is no search for truth here at all. And I say this because they were asking for the Lord’s opinion on something they didn’t even believe in! So, they come up with this complex hypothetical scenario, something that would probably never happen in real life, and they bring it to the Lord, demanding an answer.

So, remembering that the Sadducees only considered the five books of Moses to be authoritative, the Lord takes them back to Exodus 3, and the Lord bases His argument on the tense of a verb in the statement that God made to Moses at the burning bush. Since God said that He IS the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and since God made that statement to Moses hundreds of years after those men had died, then it follows that Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob must be alive in some form! Otherwise, God should have said that He WAS the God of those three men. And at that point, the religious leaders were stunned and did not have the courage to ask the Lord any more trick questions.

Well, there is a lot we could get out of this paragraph, but I would like for us to just focus in on the idea that God is a God of now. And what I mean by that is that God rules in the present. God is not just a God of 2000 years ago, or 3000 years ago, or 4000 years ago, but rather, God IS; in other words, God is God right now. Even today, God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God of Moses, He is the God of Peter and Paul, and He is also our God, right now! God is not just the God of a moment here and there, but God IS. And that is the second basic idea that I was hoping we could get out of this series of lessons.

Conclusion:

First of all, then, we are a part of the story. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are our spiritual ancestors. As men, they were very different, but they were faithful, and we can learn from what they did. And then secondly, we also learn that God is still their God. God is their God right now. It’s not that God used to be their God, but God is their God even today. And that also should be encouraging to us, knowing that God is a God of now. God still answers prayers, and God still takes care of His people. That is encouraging!

This morning, then, it comes back to us. How is our faith doing? The Bible teaches that faith comes by hearing the word of Christ. Our faith develops as we read about the life of Christ. Over the next few weeks, I would encourage all of us to take some time to read one of the four gospel accounts. The book of Matthew is concise. Matthew was basically an accountant, and the words are very precise and carefully chosen. Mark is the shortest book, with only 16 chapters, and Mark writes almost like a teenager. The book is shorter than the others, but Mark rambles with excitement: Jesus went here, and then He did this, and then He did that—a lot

of action in the book of Mark. The book of Luke was written by a medical doctor, and the book of Luke is well-researched, written almost like a term paper or a thesis or a dissertation—a lot of detail, a big emphasis on things being written down in consecutive order. And then the book of John was written by one of the Lord's closest friends, and it is obvious that this book is written from a dear friend's point of view. The book was written later, when John was older. Faith like that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob comes by reading the words of Christ. I hope we can set aside some extra time to study those words over the next few days.

This morning we praise God for sending Jesus to this earth in human form, to live a perfect life, and to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins!

The word of God tells us that we demonstrate our faith through obedience; that is, we turn away from sin, and we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism. At that point, we become children, heirs of the promise made to Abraham, as we are born into the family of God. If you have any questions, please let us know, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, please let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com