

February 24, 2013

## Scripture Lessons

*Philippians 3:17-4:1*

*Genesis 15:1-12*

**Sermon**      *Keep Looking Up*

My great grandfather on my Mom's side of the family was nearly ninety years old when he was fitted for the first time for a hearing aid. Dad Cota, they had called him, had been deaf for a long time and whether it was out of vanity or just plain stubbornness or financial necessity, I am not too sure, Yet for some reason never purchased an hearing aid until he was missed out on a good many of the sounds of life. And what a difference it had made in his life when he finally got that hearing aid. At first my grandmother said he sort of cringed because he was able to look around him and hear sounds were so loudly that he had not heard perhaps for twenty years or thirty years. A grin came on his face and he couldn't believe the things the kinds of things, he had been missing out on for all that time. Dad Cota only lived a couple more years and some people will argue that it was a kind of waste of money to spend so much on a hearing aid for a person who was almost ninety years old. But that one small thing that so improved the quality of his life that I suspect that he didn't think it was a waste at all. In fact I am certain, he never saw or perhaps I should say heard the world in the same way ever, ever again.

You know many of us who have perfect vision nevertheless have the same experience that Dad Cota with our ability to see things around us. Instead of taking in what I would call the broad view of the world we wear sort of narrow blinders which shut out much of all the good that goes on all around us every day in favor of only seeing what dark; only that which is bad; only that which is sinister; only that which is negative; only that which I would call half empty in the glass rather than half full. To use another image rather than looking up and seeing the wonder that God has put all around us in the world, we focus our gaze downward so all we notice is imperfections in life; the cracks in the sidewalk, so to speak, in the world around us. We see these things even in our friends and in our family, in our church, school, work, and our community and even in our country and in our world all around us. What a draining thing that must be. What a burden that has to be to bare day by day. What a difficult life that must be to live. Certainly I am not foolish enough to agitate living a life that is blind to the reality of life all around us. But what I am saying is to be aware of reality is only the first

step in our journey of faith and it is what we do with that reality that helps. No one for example had more reason than the patriarch Abraham had to keep his views solidly fixed on those negative cracks in the sidewalk. At 75 years of age as I shared with the boys and girls this morning, Abraham was called by God to have his house in the East deserted and to take all that he had and his whole clan and resettle in a place that he had never seen before in his entire life. And the promise of God that was simply this, if you go, if you take the chance the promises I give to you I will make of you a great nation. So Abraham did as God had asked him and upon arriving in the promised land, the land of Canaan, God made yet another promise to Abraham, "to your offspring I will give this land". But before the second promise could ever sink in, Abraham was on the move again. There was famine in the land and Abraham and his whole clan as with others of his descendants in the years to come headed for the plenty of Egypt to ride out the hard times. But upon returning from Egypt to the land, upon saving his nephew Lot from kidnapping, and from routing his enemies in a time of battle, Abraham was one tired pilgrim. And the next time God spoke to him even Abraham could not help being discouraged. "Oh Lord God", he says (in the passage that Micki read for us today) for what will you give me for I continue childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus, my slave. Which God replied with words of encouragement that Abraham would never forget for the rest of his life "Look toward the heavens and count the stars if you see them and are able to count them so shall your descendants be". And scripture tells us after that Abraham believed the Lord and the Lord reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.

I would like to stand here and tell you Abraham and his wife Sarah and whole family lived happily ever and I could end the sermon right now. They had scads of children and they retired in plenty in Arizona someplace. And they never had any further difficulties that they had to face in life but unfortunately I can't. We had a stained glass window in my last church that reminded us of at least one more trial that Abraham had to face amongst many in the future. And that was to near sacrifice his son Isaac and there were others as well. There were times too, when Abraham and Sarah just plain lost hope and went their own way in total rejection of God's plan for their life and even times when they thought God's plan was so crazy and impossible of God that Sarah laughed at God. And of course humor in difficult time is not such a bad thing. But no matter how weary Abraham became, no matter how battled and bruised in life he was; no matter how discouraged he was or hopeless looked in life it Abraham; it appears that Abraham kept following God's words of encouragement to keep looking up into the sky; to keep faith with God's promises; to see as we have described before, the glass half full and there is good in the world all around us and many of the people that encounter every day in this world. It is fact as the old hymn says Our Father's

World and that God is in control of what God has made and God will never let any of us go. Our psalm for today, Psalm 27 vs.1 reminds us in fact that with God in our midst, we have nothing to fear. The Lord is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear. The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall be afraid. So we like Abraham we are encouraged to keep our heads up, to keep looking up at the stars, count our blessings and the stars and remember the promises that God has made to us not, naively but knowing full well that there will be many bumps in the road that we call life but even with those bumps as the Palmist reminds us God will be our light. God will be our salvation. God will be our stronghold no matter what we have to face in life. So keep looking up and look at the stars. And together we say AMEN