

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
July 24, 2016
Genesis 18:20-32
It is Important to Express Our Faith in Prayer
Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends of God through Christ Jesus,

Prayers for our nation are a regular part of our worship intercessions; not to mention our personal daily prayers. Those prayers include petitions on behalf of ourselves and fellow believers who live in a society determined to oppose God and his holy will. As we look at Abraham and his situation, we can relate because we are in the same situation.

Wouldn't it be nice if God were to do for us what he did for his friend, Abraham? The LORD told Abraham that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were so extensive, they cried out for God's immediate judgment which he would carry out. We live in a society that tolerates and even validates the sexual immorality and idolatry that characterized those cities located at the southern basin of the Dead Sea. Unlike Abraham, the LORD has not told us his plans for America.

When Abraham heard the news about God carrying out his judgment, Abraham appealed to God to continue his mercy on the believers in the city. These believers were Abraham's family. Abraham did not want his family to suffer along with the unbelievers as can and does happen when God lays his axe to the root of every tree that does not bear fruit.

Abraham expressed his faith in prayer that the LORD would be merciful to his believers. We do the same. **It is Important to Express Our Faith in Prayer.** Prayer is our oasis in the midst of the desert of sin. The LORD hears our prayers for the sake of his mercy.

Abraham and his family, including his nephew Lot, his wife and children, were living in the middle of a desert of sexual sins and idolatry. The men of the city even attacked the two created angels that later visited Lot's house in order to have sex with them. When the LORD, and it is meaningful that we have his covenant of mercy name, told Abraham his intentions, his good friend expressed his faith in that mercy in prayer.

Abraham offered up prayers to the LORD to spare the city for the sake of the righteous, that is those who were righteous in his sight through faith in the promise of the Savior. He started with 50 believers and counted down to 10. At each place the LORD vowed his faithfulness in mercy to spare, literally "pardon" the city for the sake of the righteous.

Incredibly, God allows us as he allowed Abraham to get a peek into the tension between carrying out his justice, and continuing his mercy. On the one hand, God is not mocked and his holy wrath comes down against those who have hardened themselves in wickedness and unbelief. On the other hand, those same judgments serve as a deliverance to his believers. We see this in the Flood, for example, where the same water that destroys, saves.

Abraham teaches us that prayer is our oasis in the midst of the desert of sin. We are to pray boldly to the LORD for ourselves and for our fellow believers. We are surrounded by the same sexual immorality and idolatry that cries out for God's judgment.

Abraham admitted both his boldness and his unworthiness "I have been so bold to speak to the LORD, though I am but dust and ashes." We do not know the LORD's immediate intentions. We do know his mercy on behalf of his church. We rely on that. We also know his promise of wrath against unbelief. We fully expect and accept it. We also fully expect the LORD hears our prayers for the sake of his mercy.

The LORD heard Abraham's prayer but there was not even 10 believers in the city. After the men attacked the angels at Lot's house, God through the angels told Lot to take the few believers in his family and flee the coming destruction of the city. They did just that. Sadly, Lot's wife looked back toward the city with a heart that loved this world more than God, and his sons in law and their wives laughed and Moses does not mention they escaped. God rained down fire and brimstone that burned up those cities as in a furnace.

The LORD hears our prayers for the sake of his mercy. We have prayed for the church in our society and the church still stands. We have prayed that the LORD allow us to continue to be free to preach law and gospel in love to unbelievers around us. He has heard our prayer and the time of grace for our society continues. How long that will continue we do not know. We do know that as we pray, for the sake of the church, the Lord will continue properly to execute that tension between his judgment and his mercy.

We are living in a time and circumstance seemingly approaching quickly the conditions that led to the destruction of those two cities and others on the plain south of the Dead Sea. What can we do about it? Preach the Word. Be faithful in season and out of season. And, pray. Pray for the church. Pray for safety and deliverance and acceptance when in one terrific act, like the Flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God's judgment and mercy meet in action.

Finally, this is what will take place on Judgment Day. The LORD's mercy in Jesus Christ our Savior, that belongs to believers, will save us. Christ's blood and righteousness will enable us to stand midst flaming worlds as God destroys the universe.

We are indeed nothing but dust and ashes, sinners. But like Abraham, we also are chosen by God and blessed by the Savior Jesus who would come from Abraham's line. Right before God told Abraham what he was going to do, God told the angels and Abraham why he was going to tell him. Abraham would be a great and powerful nation. I have chosen him. I will direct his children and his household to do what is right. I will do all of this so that I bring about all I have promised him.

This is why God has told us these things. He has chosen us. He will direct us and our households to do what is right. All of those as the LORD God does for us what he promises. He hears our prayers. He delivers us from his wrath and judgment. Therefore, it is important to express our faith in prayer. Prayer is our oasis. The LORD hears our prayers for the sake of his mercy. Amen. <SDG>