

*Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

*1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## **“Sons of Abraham”**

Texts: Genesis 15:1-6, Luke 16:19-31, John 8:31-34

### **Introduction: God’s Grandchildren?**

“Pastor, this isn’t your church! This is our church! My grandparents helped build this church. My grandfather built your pulpit. My grandmother made those banners. We were going to this church long before you came and we will be here long after you are gone.”

Every pastor who has been in the ministry for a while has heard those words or something very similar. I hadn’t been in the ministry very long before I heard them. In fact, I’ve heard similar words at all three churches where I have served.

The sons and daughters of the saints can be great blessings when they have a vibrant, personal faith. They can be real curses when they do not.

An older woman in my vicarage congregation used to say, “God doesn’t have grandchildren. You are either his child or you are not but he doesn’t have grandchildren.” She was right. Either you have faith in Christ or you don’t. What your grandparents believed is great for them but it won’t save you.

Today I want to talk about a theme in our Old Testament lesson and in our Gospel lesson. It may not be the central focus of each text but it runs through them and much of the Scripture. The theme is the sons of Abraham. Who are they and what does it mean for us today?

### **Father Abraham Had Many Sons**

Many of you may remember an old Sunday school song, “Father Abraham.”

Father Abraham had many sons  
Many sons had Father Abraham  
I am one of them and so are you  
So let's all praise the Lord.

There are a whole lot of cute movements that go along with it. I am sure that most of you are familiar with it.

The song is right in saying Father Abraham had many sons. We know that he had Ishmael with his maid Hagar. Then he had Isaac with his wife Sarah. Finally, he had six children with a concubine named Keturah. That’s at least eight children but only one heir.

Only Isaac inherited the majority of his estate and the promises that God had given to his descendants. Only one out of eight was a son of Abraham according to the Spirit and the flesh. Seven of the eight were sons according to the flesh alone.

Jesus says, “Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 7:14) This is true even with Abraham’s family. Not all of them made it through the narrow gate. We can see this in many Christian families as well. Not all children continue on the straight road even if they had the right upbringing.

My point is that even though father Abraham had many sons, not all of them inherited God’s blessing.

### **Paul: Another Son of Abraham**

The apostle Paul was a true son of Abraham both spiritually and genetically. He was proud of his heritage and upset because so many of his fellow Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. He too teaches that

not all biological sons of Abraham inherit the Kingdom of God. In Romans chapter 9 Paul writes:

Romans 9:7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

The children of the promise are those who believe in the promised Messiah. It is through the Messiah that they are forgiven of their sins and made worthy to enter the Kingdom of God.

### **Jesus among the Sons of Abraham**

In Jesus' day, many of the Jews that he met were sons of Abraham due to their genetic descent but not sons through the Spirit. They didn't have the Holy Spirit so they could not see that he was (and is) their Messiah. But other Jews did have the Spirit and they recognized him as their king.

John 8:31-33 allows us to listen in as Jesus discusses this with Jewish leaders.

John 8:31 "...If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

It is interesting to notice that those who opposed Jesus the most were the ones who were most proud of their heritage. As the dialogue continues, these leaders of the Jewish nation tell Jesus that they are free even though they are under the domination of the Romans and, more importantly, under the domination of sin. They can't see that they are in

bondage in more than one way, the bondage to sin being the more important of the two.

Jesus responds by telling them that they will remain slaves to sin if they reject him but that doesn't seem to bother them. Maintaining their positions of power is more important to them than being freed from the sin that enslaves them.

When Jesus went to the cross, he took their sin with him. He offered them free forgiveness and even the ability to rule with him but they didn't want it. They rejected Jesus' free offer of forgiveness to cling to their positions of power. We too need to ask if we are clinging to sources of power rather than surrendering them to the Lord.

## **Two Sons of Abraham**

The parable from Luke that I read as our Gospel lesson tells a story about two sons of Abraham. The first son of Abraham is not named. He is simply called a rich man. Because of his wealth, he would have been considered important during his lifetime but from Jesus' perspective his name is not worth remembering.

The second son of Abraham is a poor man. Yet he is important enough to have his name mentioned by Jesus. His name is Lazarus.

Both men die, one goes to heaven and the other goes to hell. Lazarus suffered on earth so he is comforted in heaven. The rich man, who did nothing for Lazarus even though Lazarus lived outside his gate, is sent to hell. While there, the rich man cries out to his father Abraham. Abraham recognizes him as his son according to the flesh by calling him, "Child", but tells him that he can't help him. After judgment, there is no switching from one camp to the other.

## **God's Child, not His Grandchild**

We are all children of Abraham. We are all God's children. We are brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we can't act like what our parents or grandparents did is enough. We can't rely on outward religiosity or old traditions in and of themselves. A church that is always looking to the past will grow stagnant and die.

Too many Lutheran churches are like that. They look to the fifties and sixties as their golden era but they don't face the reality that their neighborhood is changing. By the time they start to focus outward, it is too late. New churches with a different outlook have sprung up all around them.

### **Conclusion: Don't Go the Way of the Oldsmobile**

The Lutheran Church is in danger of becoming like Oldsmobile. Oldsmobile was complacent for too many years. After many decades as a successful company, young people started to see them as a car for older people. Oldsmobile tried to counter this idea with an ad campaign, "This is not your father's Oldsmobile" but by that time it was too late. GM decided to drop the brand.

We can't be content to be God's grandchildren. We can't be content to rely on what our parents did. We need to say, "What will *we* do? What kind of legacy will we create for future generations of God's people?" Are we going to be yester year's church or a vibrant place to grow? Are we going to keep saying we are Abraham's sons or are we going to *act* like we are Abraham's sons?

*May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.*