

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
August 1, 2010**

**Genesis 18:20-32**

**How Could He Be So Bold**

- 1. How does Abraham's reaction differ from what we might expect?**
- 2. Why are we shocked by his reaction?**
- 3. What is the real reason Abraham can be so bold?**
- 4. What does that mean for us?**

**Hymns: 224 – 769  
Distribution: 410 – 355  
Closing: 322**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

<sup>30</sup> Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?"

He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

<sup>31</sup> Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?"

He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."

<sup>32</sup> Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?"

He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

The servant, as we know him, always seemed to do everything the right way. He was always quick to listen and slow to speak. He was always eager to carry out the master's plans, even when the requests had at times seemed to defy logic. He had always been ready and willing to go, no matter what he was told to leave behind or where he was told to go. Books could've been written about the faithfulness of this servant. He always seemed to do things the right way.... Except in this story we are told today. In this story, the servant didn't quite agree with the master's plan and he decided to speak up. And as we listen to the servant's request, we have to ask, "How could he dare to be so bold?"

Our story today centers on the ancient city of Sodom. Wicked would be the only way to describe. It's hard for me to even compare it with any modern day city, as bad as some of them might often seem. From what the Bible tells us, it seems that this city was like nothing we would care to imagine. Jude 7 tells us that the whole city of Sodom and the surrounding area gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. This wasn't a part, it wasn't a majority, it was the entire city. Our text tells us that their sin was so grievous, it was crying out to God in heaven. Their sin was so blatant that it was almost as if it were begging to be punished. And so, that is what God decided to do. He would rain down burning sulfur on the city and leave this area as a wasteland for the rest of time. But before he brought this devastating judgment upon the city, God had visited his faithful servant Abraham. And as God left Abraham's house, He decided to let Abraham know about the coming destruction. And based on what we know about Abraham, a man of God, and what we know about Sodom, this city of the devil; we would have to guess that Abraham would praise God for finally removing these horribly heathen people from his life. Sodom and Gomorrah had been a thorn in Abraham's side for many years since his nephew Lot had chosen to live inside the walls of this perverse city. Now, that the city would be done away with, certainly Abraham would agree with God's plan just as we are accustomed to him doing so.

But that isn't what he did at all. In fact, as we listen to his words, it seems as if he is almost questioning God's plan. "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city?" Abraham

<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

<sup>22</sup> The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>[a]</sup><sup>23</sup> Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare <sup>[b]</sup> the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge <sup>[c]</sup> of all the earth do right?"

<sup>26</sup> The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake."

<sup>27</sup> Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, <sup>28</sup> what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?"

"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."

<sup>29</sup> Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"

He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."

*proposed. "Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty? Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the judge of all the earth do right?"* Can you believe the audacity of Abraham? Can you imagine anyone speaking to the Lord of all in such a way? And for what, the wicked city of Sodom?

Here is Abraham, the faithful servant who had listened as God told him to leave his homeland and settle in a foreign land far away; who had believed when God told him he would have as many descendants as sands on the seashore, who would obey when told that he should sacrifice his only son; and yet, when he was told that this wicked city would be destroyed, that is when he decided to speak up!

And when God said, *"If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake,"* did Abraham thank God for his kindness and leave it alone? No! Instead he takes his request down to 45. And not feeling confident about there being 45 believers in the city, he takes it down to 40, then 30, then 20, then all the way down to 10! And as he goes down and down and down, our shock goes up and up and up. Surely he is being too bold. These requests are outrageous. We wonder when God will say, "Enough! Who are you to question my plans?"

But that response never comes and we are surprised. As we listen to Abraham make one request after another, we've placed these preconceived limitations on what Abraham should be able to ask of God. So when he goes well past those limitations, we cringe at his boldness. We wait for God to react in anger. Though we should be admiring Abraham's boldness to pray, every time I hear this story, my first thought is how could Abraham speak like this to God. And it is all because I place these limits on Abraham. And sadly we do the same thing in our own lives. We place limits on what we can ask of God. And in doing that, we are really placing the limitations on our God. We don't have faith that it will be given to us when we ask. Why is that the case?

Maybe our faith in prayer has been shaken by previous attempts; times when it didn't seem God heard our prayer. So now we don't bother asking for much, perhaps limiting ourselves to asking Jesus to be our guest before meals. Maybe we haven't received the answers that we've wanted in the past, so now we ask only for what we know God will give us, only requesting forgiveness and daily bread in the Lord's Prayer each Sunday. Why are we not bold like Abraham in our prayers? Maybe it just comes down to the fact that we don't feel we have the right to ask our God for anything. As people who know the depths of our own sin, maybe we don't feel we have the right to

ask our God for anything but forgiveness on Sunday morning.

And it is at those times, that we need to look back to this story and understand what gave Abraham that great boldness. Look back to the scene in the beginning of our text. There is a group of 4 men standing outside Abraham's tent. There is God, the two angels and Abraham. As they stand there looking down upon the plain of Sodom, God discloses his plan to Abraham. When he finishes, the two men turn away and head toward Sodom. But God does not go with them. For all intents and purposes, his business is over at Abraham's house, but he does not go. Instead, he remains there, standing with his friend Abraham. Why would he remain? It was an invitation. God stayed there, giving Abraham this opportunity to show his faith. Though Abraham knew he was a sinful man standing before a holy and just God, he also knew that this was a God of love. He was a God of love who had just reaffirmed his promise to send a Savior. He was a God who truly wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. And so he appealed to the God of love to have mercy on the people of Sodom; first, asking God to stay his plan for the sake of 50 believers in the city. And the Father granted this request to his son. And he guided him along as Abraham asked again, for 45, then 40, then 30, then 20, until Abraham KNEW that he could ask for 10. As Abraham stood there, probably shaking in his sandals, God stayed by his side, inviting him to ask. How could Abraham be so bold? God encouraged him to be and gave him the strength!

And you know what, sons and daughters of Abraham, God also comes to us and stays by us throughout our lives, inviting us to ask of him boldly. He has assured us through baptism that we are his children. He is not a master who holds his plans over us. He is a loving Father who has graciously given us all things. He gave us his Son, He gives us forgiveness. And He has given us this incredible gift with the ability to call upon him in any and every situation and so often we let our sinful nature get in the way. However, as often as we might turn away, God remains there, ready to forgive, ready to answer when we call on his name. And we can be confident that God will listen to our prayers and answer them. He will hold to his promise, *"Ask and it will be given to you! Seek and you will find! Knock and the door will be opened for you!"* And with that assurance, we can begin this new time in the ministry of Holy Trinity by being incredibly bold. We know that God is by our side, waiting to hear from us. He is anxious to listen to our ambitious requests for the spread of his Gospel and the growth of his kingdom. He wants us to make great plans and ask for his blessing upon them. When obstacles are in the way, he wants us to have faith that when we ask he is able to remove them. Like Abraham we come before God with humble faith, but bold requests. We can be filled with confidence that if

our requests are in line with the Lord's will, he will grant them to us. And so, there is only one question left to ask: What will you be bold to ask God for?