

TAKING A RISK

How many times have you started over again in Life? Either because you wanted to or because you had to. I bet that each time there was some risk involved. Many things or circumstances make us start over again or change. Marriage. Retirement. A job. *Where* would you be today if you had not taken the risk? It's obvious if we are here right now, we made a **change** in the clock last night before we went to bed! That's **not** a risk really; it's not a life-changing life-shattering thing. The kind of change we are talking about this morning is a leaving behind, moving on, to **embrace a new and uncertain future**. That is exactly where Grace Lutheran finds itself at this point in its journey.

Lent is about a journey. In the early church Lent was about the catechumenate preparing for Easter Baptism. Lent still carries the theme of baptism and that means CHANGE and new life. Through Baptism we belonging to GOD and ONLY God. That is a huge change because God calls us to start over again as a new being in Christ Jesus. Baptism frees us to make changes, to NOT remain in one spot, entrenched, unmovable, and stuck. We are to embrace **God's call** to live a new life. God is **always** doing a new thing. We belong to a "**Spirit--Goes--Where--It--Will--God.**" This God says: **move. GO! God's purposes** are often NOT about **our** comfort, convenience, safety, or well-being. *But rather* that WE--The Church, be a church that reaches out to bring the Good News and to share Jesus with others. **Often** it means starting over again to keep God's purposes at the center.

You may remember our Advent Lesson over a year ago about Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age. God chose them to fulfill God's purposes. God took what was old and created a new life through them—John the Baptist. **All to fulfill God's purposes. Today** we hear about Abram and Sarai who were OLD. God chose them to become God's instruments of blessing. Through them there would be blessing for all the families of the earth. God was asking Abram and Sarai in their old age to take the biggest risk of their lives. They were asked to leave everything they had ever known—homeland, family, friends, their house, and their security. **God said GO! GO**, believing ONLY in God's Word--that God would fulfil God's promises to them. God's Word intervened in their old and dying lives, to refresh and renew the whole earth with the Blessings of God... through them. God promised them that no matter how old you are or the condition of your life, it is worth taking the risk to start over again!! God is a **promise maker**. And we know God to be a promise keeper.

This God of ours creates out of NOTHING. God spoke the universe and our world into being. God's Word creates and gives life. God's Spirit blows across what was dead to breathe life and bring new life where there was little or nothing. This God calls **The Crucified Dead in The Tomb Jesus—TO LIFE!** ... Through **The Cross and Resurrection**... through the **Spirit--Goes--Where--It--Will**, THE CHURCH is called into existence! Where there was nothing—there is **now Life**. You can start all over again when there is nothing, **if you believe** in this God who takes nothing and simply by A Word, new life and new possibilities come into being. There is a NEW Grace Lutheran Church waiting to be birthed. **Are you willing to take the RISK... to believe, and throw yourselves with reckless abandon into God's promises?**

Nicodemus couldn't believe in starting over again—it was a huge puzzle to him. Nicodemus represented the Status Quo and the world of Brick and Mortar. What you see **IS reality**. What you see is what you get. By stealth in the night he seeks out Jesus to test **his** views and **his** realities. Jesus did not disappoint him. "*Nicodemus, you have to start all over again! A new reality is ready to crash in on your world and everything will change. Your orderly world soon won't exist. And then what?*" (It is sad that sometimes a person's world **DOES** have to fall apart in order for them to **start over again**.) Jesus continued something like this: "Nicodemus, **you** need to be made anew—start over again. Let the Spirit get into you for a rebirth. **You must be willing to take some risks...** break out of the mold, let go, leave things behind, venture out with **The--Spirit--Goes--Where--It--**

Will. Nicodemus... Have faith in God's love, that it is stronger than anything in the world. **Believe.** Do NOT perish but have eternal life through God's Son.

Abram and Sarai are our models in faith; showing us how to trust in God and God's Promises. In **today's** reading we see **NO** doubt or confusion. But as we read on in Genesis... they doubt, and they question. Unfortunately, at times they wander so far from God's promises that they take the future into their own hands--with a not so good outcome. "*Do we trust this God whom we cannot see with the promises unfulfilled, OR do we trust ourselves and what we know?"* But looking back at the Promises as we heard in today's reading, we know that Abram and Sarai **would be** God's instruments of blessing—fulfilling God's purposes. It **wasn't** all about them after all. It was all about GOD and God's purposes... God's saving purposes for the whole world where all the families of the earth would receive God's blessings. **It's about GOD.** It's not about you or me, or even Grace... **except** as God can use this congregation **to bless others.**

Lent begins in the **darkness** of winter and in the **darkness** of the soul. We make a baptismal journey **with Jesus** toward the **darkness** of death on Good Friday and the **deep unyielding darkness of a closed tomb.** Where are God's Promises now? Where is that Blessing giver? Where is that Promise Maker? The Silence of death and darkness speak loudly.

But this journey we make during Lent **asks us** to **TAKE A RISK**; to let go; to let God take over our lives, and like Abram and Sarai—**GO!** It is after all a journey of Faith. AND **Faith is** after all... at the last ... **the capacity to RISK!** And in doing so, we find ourselves NOT in darkness but rather... in the Light of Resurrection with the Risen Lord Jesus Christ.

You can do this Grace. I believe in God and what God wants to do here through you.... just like with old Zechariah and Elizabeth... Just like old Abram and Sarai, and yes, like Nicodemus with his questions and doubts. Because here is the Gospel truth: Nicodemus first came to Jesus by stealth in the deep darkness of night. ... On Good Friday, **Nicodemus** stands at the foot of the Cross, braving the light of day, **RISKING everything**—his position, his reputation, even his life! **From darkness to light.** He comes to help remove the body of Jesus from The Cross; and to assist with the burial. **FAITH** finally moved him to belief and trust in the God who is bigger than darkness and death. He came to have faith in God's promises of rebirth, new life and a future which God held in Jesus, God's beloved Son. **And Faith IS, in the final analysis, the capacity to RISK!**

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