

Lent II

“The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above....Hail, Abraham’s Lord Divine.”

These words were sung in this week’s Processional Hymn. Abraham was perceived as the Patriarch of several religious traditions. The Book of Genesis recalls numerous stories associated with this ancient Patriarch named Abraham who by tradition lived somewhere between 2000 and 1800 BCE. We are told that Abraham was called by God out of the land of Ur and God made several promises to him. Abraham lived up to his call from God and eventually, as God promised, became the father of many peoples. This is an interesting story but I want to suggest to you that there is the possibility that this specific person never lived. I made a promise to myself years ago that I would tell my biological children and the children in my care as their priest what I believed about Biblical stories because I believe biblical stories offer great learning opportunities. I also believe we have an obligation to attempt to understand how those specific stories may have come about and the significance of those stories today as they impact and influence our lives.

The first material of the Hebrew tradition was written 800 to a thousand years after the time that Abraham would have lived. I believe what we have here is a people defining their heritage, who are we, where did we come from as a people. The story of Abraham offers the Hebrew people a beginning place for their unique relationship with a God they call Yahweh.

The significance of Abraham, I believe, is not whether he actually lived but what the stories developing around this ancient figure tells us about the ancient Hebrews’ perception of God, God’s call and our response. The very beginning of this ancient story has this very humble man coming into contact with the Holy One, with God and having that God say to him, I have a vocation for you and it entails among other things leaving the familiar surroundings of your family and your heritage. And Abraham says yes, and he goes forth and is tested mightily. Abraham responds with faith and trust in this new-found God and later in the

New Testament St. Paul writes Abraham's faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness."

Abraham becomes the model for the Hebrew tradition and the Christian tradition of what it means to be a person of faith. We have to be open and available to the presence of the Holy in our lives and then exhibit a willingness to respond to the Holy. We also need to appreciate that God's call upon our lives entails moving out from where we are in our lives at that moment. That can be frightening. We may not always be comfortable where we are in our lives and our relationships but it is risky to change, and to hear God say "come on, trust Me" is often tough to do and yet, as we see through Father Abraham's story, that is where new, exciting and yes, challenging life begins.

A life of faith and trust is Father Abraham's gift to us as it informs and prepares each of us to be open and responsive to God who calls each of us each and every moment of our lives.

Amen.