

## THE SEED OF FAITH

*Scriptural program on Faith, the solid rock upon which our seven founders built our Sisterhood.*

To our P.E.O. founders, faith was the solid rock upon which they built their Sisterhood. Those who followed have acknowledged that faith under-girded the accomplishments of our past, continues to do so in the present, and holds for us the exciting hope for the future. Certainly something this important should be examined, so let us consider what faith is, and how we get it.

We start with the premise that the God of the Hebrew prophets and of the Christian faith is the God of every part of history. We recognize Him as the Creator, who instituted the series of events which constitute history, the Providence who never deserts history, and the one who will conclude it in His own time.

In Hebrews 11:1 we read "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Beginning with Abel, the writer lists men who, by faith, represented in many circumstances the attitude of the soul which confidently expects great things from God. I have chosen Abraham as one who believed and trusted God because he felt the mixture of expectancy, mystery and awe we associate with all of God's revelations to us.

By our standards we would say that Abraham was already in his golden years when God tapped him, saying in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great."

This was the second time Abraham had been uprooted from a comfortable life, so there must have been a secret yearning for something better than he had thus experienced in life. When God speaks, it is in persuasive tones, and Abraham was willing to go in faith, not knowing the land into which he was being led – in this trust was "the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". If faith can see every step of the way, it is not really faith, for faith is not holding on or being safe in the harbor, but letting go and setting sail, ready for adventure with God! Like Abraham, when we put our trust in God, we may be led to do or say things that would have seemed impossible before.

We would like to think that Abraham's troubles were over when he and his nephew Lot and all of their households arrived in the land of promise, but such was not the case. We are told they found no city that welcomed them and they continued to live in tents as a stranger in the land. We might have said "some promised land!", for in addition there was a famine in the land at that time, and they had to flee south to Egypt to survive, but Abraham's faith was one of patience, and he continued to trust God and his promise of an inheritance. Negativism cannot prevail when faith is at work, for God's promises have a positive reward.

While in Egypt Abraham and Lot prospered, and in due course they returned to the place where Abraham had built an altar to God many years before, and once again God renewed His promise to him, this time telling him that he would be the father of a multitude of nations. We are told that Abraham was now 99 years old, and his wife Sarah, who was barren, was 90 years old. Abraham's reaction to God's message is amusing, for the Bible says that he fell on his face laughing, and questioned God how this could be? We are told that at first Sarah laughed too when she heard the news, but she was learning that with God all things are possible, and that you could trust Him to keep His promises. She was the first woman in the writer's roll of the faithful who learned that "faith was the assurance of things hoped for". How many times have you laughed or thought it impossible when a new idea was presented to you – your first reaction may have been the common expression used today of "no way!", but then you begin to see it's possibilities and the satisfaction it could bring to you. Could not this be God's way of planting a new seed of faith, for when, like Sarah, we examine a seemingly impossible situation, then recognize it is God's will for us, and knowing that we can trust Him to guide us to its completion, then we begin to work with God in bringing it to pass.

The final illustration of Abraham's faith was in his willingness to follow God's command to sacrifice the dearest thing in life, his only child Isaac, even though it seemed to clash with the promise that he would be the father of a multitude of nations. Here Abraham's faith was holding fast in a crisis which threatened to negate the very ends toward which his faith was directed. Yet he obeyed, trusting that God would fulfill this promise, even if he had to raise him from the dead.

We all know how the story ended, and rejoice that no matter how severely we may be tested in our journey of faith – that God will not let us down when we put our complete trust in Him. Those of you who have watched by the bedside of a loved one, critically ill, know the agony involved, yet when you release that loved one to God's care with the expectancy of good, the crisis will be resolved, and you will be given the ability to accept the outcome, whatever it may be.

I think you have caught in my reviewing this portion of Abraham's life, that a belief in God and the response we make to His promises as we demonstrate a complete trust in Him for a positive result, even though we do not always understand His leading, is a ...statement of faith. Now how does one get it in the first place?

We all have in us this seed of faith, for it is something we are given the day we are born, and in planting the seed God has given us a capacity for it that is tremendous. We all know that at birth the one fear that is innate is the fear of falling, but when a mother holds her baby over her head and lets it fall ever so slightly into her arms, the baby will laugh and ask for more, for fear is overcome by the love and trust felt in the one with the outstretched arms. As the child grows a little older and his father takes him for a walk in the woods, he is unafraid because his hand is being held by one he trusts, and he knows he will not get lost. As you can see, in the beginning our parents nurture this seed by the love and care they demonstrate to us. As the years go by, fear begins to

take over and faith can be pushed into the background, and the struggle between fear and faith begins.

Faith can be resurrected, however, and we don't have to look for it to come from someplace else, for remember God has equipped us with all we need. It is up to us to cultivate it as we would the seeds we plant in the earth. This is done by a study of God's word and learning from the teachings of Jesus how life can have meaning and fulfillment for us. Do you remember His admonition for entrance in the kingdom? – "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." If we exhibit the same faith in God's leading as that found in the baby and young child, our fears will be dispelled, and our faith will grow and blossom, becoming a source of strength, enabling us to overcome all odds.

We all know that God's time schedule and ours is not always the same, and that there will be disappointments and delays in the goals we hope to achieve, but the patience we show will determine the strength of our faith.

For me, the keyword to all of this is "prayer", for faith can be strengthened only as we communicate with God and keep our hearts and minds open for His will to be made known to us. If our relationship to Him is strong, it will be channeled into every aspect of our living.

Another of our virtues which is so intertwined with faith that it is difficult to think of one without the other is love, but since it will be brought to you tomorrow, I will just say that it is only when we feel the love of God, as revealed to us through Jesus, the Christ, can faith be put into action for Him and one another, then it will follow that we will be able to "radiate all light possible", for the seed of faith will have blossomed and multiplied.

Adaptation of a prayer from the Diary of Daily Prayer by J. Barrie Shepherd:

O God, you are calling us out into new adventures in faith, a time in which we will encounter the unexpected, the strange, the unknown.

May we go forth as Abraham did, long ago, trusting only in you, your promises, your presence to guide, your power to preserve us from all evil.

When we are tested – as we know we will be tested – let us respond out of love, the depth of your love in us. May we be ready to give ourselves even to the utmost, for you and your gospel, and for those for whom you died.

And when we reach the end of this day, draw us to yourself again, and let our day have been to some a source of blessing, and to us a source of deeper faith.

In the name of Him who was, even before Abraham was, Jesus Christ, our call, our guide, our goal.

Amen