

TEXTS: Gen.25.5-11; Heb.11.1-3; 8-16;
DATE: 2007-06 New Zealand Deputation
Praise Selection: Great is Thy Faithfulness
TITLE: God Is Not Finished Yet

I. Scriptures

A. Genesis 25:5-11 (NASB95)

⁵ Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; ⁶ but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east. ⁷ These are all the years of Abraham's life that he lived, one hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸ Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people. ⁹ Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, ¹⁰ the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth; there Abraham was buried with Sarah his wife. ¹¹ It came about after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac lived by Beer-lahai-roi.¹

B. Hebrews 11:1-3; 8-16 (NASB95)

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the men of old gained approval. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. ¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. ¹⁵ And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.²

¹ New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995. The Lockman Foundation: LaHabra, CA

² New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995. The Lockman Foundation: LaHabra, CA

II. Terms:

When I told someone that I was going to talk about fishing today to folks from the bottom of the world, that person told me that I should spend some time defining terms that had to do with fishing in Canada so that there would be no confusion with what I was talking about.

If I did this and it actually happened that no one was then confused while I was talking ... well, that would be a completely new experience for me. Most people are confused when speak.

Some of the people who have to listen to me regularly preach get so confused that their eyelids begin to flutter and glaze over until they slip completely into unconscious.

And you know, they never seem to mind ... in fact they seem to be quite happy with the results.

However, not one to shy away from new experiences, here is my definition of terms for today.

I am going to require two things from you.

The first thing is a nice Canadian 1 dollar coin.

Any one have one? Huh that's a surprise.

If you don't have one in your own pocket, here is one to pass around.

As it comes around look at the coin.

Now, look at the side that does not have the Queens head on it. (No the other side does not have the Queen's backside on it, I am not sure why ... if you have the front side on one side you would expect that the backside would be on the other side.)

At any rate, what do you see on the backside of the Queen on the Canadian 1 dollar coin?

That's right ... that big duck looking bird floating on the lake is called a loon. It is a large fish eating duck like bird, often up to 20 pounds or a half-dozen kilograms in weight.

And they love to fish where I fish.

Now give my coin, back to me.

I am Presbyterian after all, and just a tad thrifty.

The second term requires you to use your imagination.

When I do this, what am I doing (cast an imaginary rod)?

That's right, I am casting a fishing rod that has a fishing line attached to a fishing reel ... and on the end of the line is a fishhook.

Now, what am I doing (reel in an imaginary reel)?

That's right, I am reeling in meters and meters of fishing line onto a fishing reel where the line is neatly stored and never gets tangled.

Now, if I do this what am I doing (Pretend to hold a rod while sleeping)?

That's right, I am trolling my fishing line behind my boat with a hook on it hoping there is a fish more dozy than I am that will bite the hook and presto ... dinner.

There were done.

Now I can preach and no one will get confused and slip into unconsciousness , and I will have a completely new experience.

III. Proclamation (Gen.25.5-11)

I stumbled over a friend of mine at a local trout fishing lake the other day.

We share shopping privileges at a neighboring Cariboo-Chilcotin cow town and normally only get to visit at funerals and on town day.

It was a treat to chat without the usual pressures.

Noticing my relaxed demeanor, Ian immediately tried to steal one of my fishing secrets.

Because of it, he almost came to a delightful end.

After skulking away from our seemingly innocent chat with my secret "hooked" firmly in his rumpled old fishing hat, and when he thought I was no longer watching, Ian sprinted for his little fishing boat.

He fished nonstop for the next two days with my secret fly hook and only caught a couple of course and inedible bottom feeding fish we call suckers (Heh, heh, which proves the theory that there is a sucker born every minute).

Since the lake was teeming with beautiful lively and large rainbow trout, the king of game and eating fish, this would have been a delightful ending in itself, until God, who I am convinced is not only sovereign but also a fisherman, decided to make things even more interesting and delightful.

Ian was beached at his campsite resting up from a hard day of sucker fishing, when a mutual friend trolled by and reported a trout feeding frenzy just to the north.

Ian threw himself and three fishing rods of varying denominations into his ten-foot fishing boat and made like the ringtails for the reported trout feeding frenzy.

After a couple of hours of serious trout fishing without even a sucker to show for it, Ian proceeded back to the campsite with my secret fly hook innocently trolling behind him at the end of his line.

At precisely the time when his boat was perfectly in view of all the other campers, suddenly the line screamed off of Ian's reel and his fly rod bent in half.

At the other end of the line a marvelous 5 pound rainbow trout leapt 3 feet out of the water.

At precisely that moment, Ian was in the midst of a fishing induced coma. Suddenly he regained consciousness, almost choking on a snore and his tongue.

He gasped for breath and grabbed for fishing rods.

Not sure which rod he should deal with first, it took him a few moments to go through the process of tangling all three rods in the bottom of the boat in order to figure it out.

When he finally settled on the fly-rod with the rampaging rainbow attached, there was a real mess happening in the bottom of the boat, which Ian decided to add too by hand stripping his fly-line into the bottom of the boat instead of reeling decently and in good order (Ian is a Scot but not a Presbyterian).

The mess and tangle of fishing line building up in the bottom of the boat was down right sinful (but not being a Presbyterian, that did not bother Ian, nor did it make him feel guilty)

Somehow Ian got the large trout up to the boat, saw the size of the thing, gasped, and almost choked.

At precisely the same moment, the rainbow trout saw Ian, saw the size of the thing, gasped and headed for the bottom of the lake.

Ian became as busy as a one armed paperhanger trying to facilitate the trout's run for the bottom of the lake from the tangled line of three fishing rods in the bottom of the boat.

That's when a spectator, a rather huge loon (a fish eating diving duck), decided it would be fun to get involved in the game.

He started to chase the fish, diving and loon-cussing for all he was worth. Now the fish really got excited.

So did Ian.

He was now combating fish and fowl, hollering and waving his hat at the loon at the same time as he was desperately tangling and untangling his fishing line from three rods of varying denominations in the bottom of the boat ... to facilitate the trout's run.

Things were getting loud, frantic and real interesting when Ian remembered a cardinal rule of fly-fishing; *'one should always get one's landing net ready long before one's fish arrives at the boat.'*

With what must have been a fourth arm, Ian grabbed behind him for the landing net and gave it a tug.

It wouldn't come off the bottom of the boat.

It was tangled in some darned thing, so Ian gave it a tremendous yank.

It came loose ... and as he lifted it up over the water Ian gasped as he saw the plug from the bottom of the boat dangling from the bottom of the net and felt the icy water streaming in around his feet.

And then, almost in slow motion, the plug dropped off of the net into the lake and sank to the bottom of the lake.

I have no idea exactly how this story ends.

I wasn't even able to watch it unfold with the rest of the congregation gathered on the beach; I was too busy getting skunked in another part of the lake at the time.

Ian generously told me the story later that evening.

And when I asked him how the story ended he refused to give further details as to the ending except to say: *"It has not ended yet, It ain't finished yet! Tomorrow I am going to catch that fish's bigger cousin with your hook."*

With that he left, muttering over his shoulder, *"There must be a sermon in that story somewhere."*

Here it is.

IV. The Text (Gen.25.5-11)

As I said, I have no idea exactly how the story ended.

And I think that's the sermon in it.

Fly-fishing doesn't end.

There is just a pause before taking off again.

Fly-fishing is like that.

Stories about fly-fishing are like that.

The life of faith is especially like that.

With regards to endings, the Christian life imitates fly-fishing.

They are both great big stories that don't end.

As a fly-fisher and storyteller and Christian, I have spent far too much of my time searching for endings, usually with "happy-ever-afters" attached.

It's taken me thus far in my lifetime to learn that there ain't any real endings.

But oh man, can the story ever get interesting and blessed along the way.

If you are too ending oriented you risk missing out on the real interesting blessed middle.

In the bible, the life of Abraham is a case in point.

I expect you all know his story.

Abraham's story begins way back Genesis 11 when he suddenly shows up listed as a 9th generation descendent of Noah's son Shem.

Sari or Sarah as she is later known, is named also in this list ... as Abraham's wife and as barren ... which in biblical terms means childless and unable to have children.

They are listed as recent immigrants from the land of Ur (at the mouth of the Euphrates river in what is today southern Iraq) ... to land of Haran (600 miles to the Northwest in what is now Southern Turkey).

Just a few verses later, in Genesis 12, Abraham, (or Abram as he is named at first), is chosen from all the families of the earth, and is called by God: *"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing. " (Genesis 12:1-2, NASB95)*³

Abraham and Sarah depart from Haran with a definite calling and a detailed promise from God ... and thus begins a tremendous story of faith.

The promise to Abraham includes receiving a great land, having many offspring, becoming a great nation and mediating a blessing to all other peoples.

And so Abraham and Sarah (who is still childless) set off for Canaan (or Palestine) and God renews the promise: *"Look around you, as far as*

³ *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update.* 1995. The Lockman Foundation: LaHabra, CA

the eye can see, this is the land I am going to give you ... I will give it to your many descendants."

No sooner does Abraham look around than a famine hits the land and Abraham and Sarah immediately have to escape to Egypt.

From my perspective, the story could have ended, sadly, at this point ... no land, no offspring, no nation.

Except, God is not finished yet.

The story continues.

After a run in with Pharaoh in Egypt, which almost ends with Sarah getting scooped up into Pharaoh's harem (and this while Sarah is about 70 years old), Abraham and Sarah run back to the Promise Land of Canaan, to Bethel.

Abraham sets to squatting on some land and farming.

After a time, again God tells Abraham to look around ... that as far as the eye can see ... God is going to give this great land to Abraham and his 'promised' many descendants.

And from my perspective, perhaps yours as well ... the story could have sadly ended again ... there are still no kids for Sarah and Abraham ... and the land of promise is still held by mighty nations.

Except, God is not finished yet.

There is a war with an alliance of 4 kings.

There is a blessing at the hands of the priest and king of Salem.

There is more squatting and farming.

Abraham says to God ... *"Uh ... I have not seen any land or kids yet."*

Abraham once again has the promise of God renewed for land, and children and blessing of the nations ... and this time a formal covenant ceremony is carried out by God.

In biblical terms, the promise is made like a legal document, if you like.

But from my perspective, the story could have ended here because nothing seems to be happening ... no kids, no land.

Except, God is not finished yet.

Abraham thinks the story has ended.

He and Sarah are still squatters on the land, and they are still childless ... so Abraham offers an ending of his own.

He fathers a son by Sarah's Egyptian maid, Hagar

Ishmael is born ... Abraham's idea of the ending of the story.
Abraham says to God ... here ... take him ... lets end this thing.
Perhaps the story should have ended there.
Except, God is not finished yet.

The promise is given again by God, along with a promise or covenant sign
this time ... the sign of circumcision.

But there is still no children or land for Abraham and Sarah.

Abraham doesn't even really have one legitimate child to circumcise yet.
And so it goes.

All the time it looks like the story is ending sadly, or even badly, but it does
not end because 'God is not finished yet.'

After the Lot fiasco with Sodom, after the birth of Isaac to Sarah, after the
testing of Abraham in offering his son Isaac, and so on and so on ...
the story never ends because 'God is not finished yet.'

And it begins to become clear that Abraham is learning to live differently.
Instead of living his life in search of an ending, preferably a happy-ever-after
ending ... Abraham is living his life, not anchored in the past, nor
grounded in the present, but floating on the future ... living his life
enjoying the fact that 'God is not finished yet' ... wondering how God is
going to work in his life in the next page of the story.

As you read on in the story, it becomes clear Abraham's life is not so much
focused on life as it was, or life as it is, or life as it should be ... but on
life as it is promised by God in the future.

This is what the Bible, especially the book of Hebrews, calls a life of faith.

In the story in the Bible, the story we read from Genesis today, finally we get
to the death of Abraham and the story is over, with Abraham having
only one legitimate son by Sarah and a gravesite that he purchased for
land, which he buried Sarah in, and in which he is now buried with her.

Except, the story is not over ... God is not finished yet.

The promise to Abraham is passed on to Isaac, Abraham's only son by
Sarah ... and the story goes on again ... because 'God is not finished
yet.'

And so it goes through Isaac's life, through Jacob's life, through Joseph's
life, through Moses' life, through Joshua's life, through Samuel's life,
through David's life, through Jesus' life.

Jesus' life ... now there is a story that looked like it ended ... with a cross and a horrible death and a tomb.

The ending seems as sealed as the tomb.

Except, God is not finished yet.

RESSURECTION!

With God, it is a never-ending story, because God is not finished yet.

II. Conclusion

My conclusion today is very simple.

Actually there are two very simple conclusions.

Conclusion number one is this.

Your life, my life, the life of faith in Christ, is a never-ending story.

Humanly, we think in finite terms, in terms of endings.

This is especially so when life is hard or when life is difficult.

But God is infinite and God does not deal in the finite or in endings.

'God is not finished yet' is the basis of what God is doing and it is the basis of our lives of faith in God.

Whatever you or I are going through just now, it is one more step in God's never ending story.

God is not finished yet.

The real question is not, 'How is it Going?' or even, 'How is this thing going to end?'

Rather it is, 'What is God going to do next?' ... 'What is God going to do in the next step of the journey -- the next page of the story?'

The life of faith is one of hope that is grounded in the certainty that God is not finished working in your life ... working with your personhood, working with your health, working with your relationships, working with your work, working with your family, working with your church.

Like Abraham and Sarah, we live lives full of promise, lives full of hope ... promise and hope steeped in God's love and God's faithfulness.

Each day we rise to the next part of the story of God and His love working in every aspect of the next page of our lives.

And filled with hope and expectation, what the Bible calls faith, we launch our boat.

Conclusion number two is this.

God is not finished yet!

It applies to the life of faith, and that is personally a great hope for me ... I trust it is a great hope for you too.

But it applies to the life of your rural community as well ... and your rural faith community.

And so conclusion number two is one you get to write.

I want us to consider two questions.

First, "What do you envision God doing next in your rural community?"

Second, "How is your rural faith Community going to participate in what God is going to do next?"