

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**Title: Count the Stars****Lesson: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18**

15 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ² But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." ⁴ But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." ⁵ He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶ And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

⁷ Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." ⁸ But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹ He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

(Slide 1) According to the Bible, Abram was the one who had the most intimate conversation with God. Today's text is about Abram's new start when he was called by God. He left his hometown, Haran, when he was already at the age of 75.

Although he is commonly called an ancestor for all God's people in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, there were times when he also doubted God's promises.

(Slide 2) One day God came to Abram in a vision and said, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield and your reward shall be very great." (1) However, Abram, worried about his lack of children, and said: "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" (2) Although God said, 'I am your shield and your reward shall be very great', Abram did not believe it because his life didn't get better.

It was during this time that Abram's troubles reached their peak. He believed God's promise and left his hometown, and although he was growing old, he had no children who would carry on his family line. To him, the word of God was just a sweet word to hear. Likewise, Abram, who is called the father of faith, did not have strong faith at one time. Rather, his faith was often shaken in the face of his uncertain reality.

He had a lot of money, but because he had no children, it was unfair and futile to think that everything he had accomplished throughout his life would be passed on to his servant, not his children, and he could not sleep at night due to worries and anxiety. At this time, God brought him outside.

(Slide 3) The night view that Abram saw when he came out of the tent was very dark. It was like his future. He couldn't see anything because it was a very dark night. But at this time God said to him: "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." (5).

God told Abram, who was looking at the earth with worry and anxiety, to look at the sky. God told Abram to open his heart and his mind. He told Abram, who doubted the covenant with God, to have faith. Abram looked up at the sky and saw countless stars twinkling.

Stars are always in the sky, bright day or dark night. However, we cannot see the stars in bright daylight. It is only in the dark of night that we can see the stars. To Abram, who looked at the countless stars, God promised that He would give him so many children like the countless stars.

Abram left his hometown at the age of 75 and did not have a single son until the age of 99. He had many fortunes, but he had no children to pass them on. So, he was living with a sense of the futility of his life. The days were coming when one

of the servants would have to be chosen as the heir to his fortune. He was already too old, and he was a wanderer. That is why he did not find any hope in his life.

God had another intention in taking Abram out of the tent and telling him to count the stars. It was not simply that God would give Abram many children, but He showed the power and sovereignty of God who created the countless stars with His word.

In life, sometimes things work out the way we want them to, and sometimes they don't. However, we don't have to give up our faith in God and our faith in God's promises. God had promised Abram that he would have many children, but Abram looked to the reality. Faced with reality, he was an old man and still had no children. Abram, who had doubts about God's covenant, heard God's voice: "Can you count all the stars in the sky?"

When we look at the stars in the sky, we realize how small we are. The Earth we live on is just one planet in the solar system. And the solar system belongs to a galaxy, and there are so many countless galaxies like that in the universe. How many stars are there in the universe and we can never count them.

(Slide 4) Paul speaks of faith. "Anyone who loves God is known by him." (1 Corinthians 8:3) Faith is believing that God remembers us, knows us, and values us. We can't fully know God, but He knows us.

When Abram was in the tent, he could not sleep because of fear, vagueness, and anxiety about the future. What does be in a tent mean? The tent represents our limitations, our uncertainty, our reality. When Abram was in the tent, he felt fear, vagueness, and insecurity because of his limitations and uncertain future. But God brought him outside, and when he saw the countless stars in the sky, God said: "So shall your descendants be." (5) When he heard God's covenant again, all his doubts were gone.

Beloved: the stars in the sky viewed without faith are completely different from the stars in the sky viewed with faith in God. Living by unbelief is completely different from living by faith. The sky he saw that night was the scenery he had usually seen. However, when Abram looked up at the night sky with the eyes of faith in God's covenant, all his worries, fears and anxieties were dispelled and they turned into faith and confidence.

Abram came back to trust the Word of God. His faith was shaken for a moment, but God took hold of his faith. Verse 6 says: “And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness”

(Slide 5) When I read the story of Abram, who is anxious after he leaves his hometown, I am reminded about my past days in the states. I prepared to study abroad and came to California because I was captured by God's call. I didn't have much understanding about American culture, though. While I was in CA, I had encountered so many realities and difficulties like cultural and language barriers and financial difficulties. Although I confessed that I believed in God, I seemed to have a lot of anxiety and worry about the reality I was facing, and about the uncertain future after graduation. Whenever that happened, I remembered the words in Genesis 28:15: “Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go... I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Beloved: maybe we are still in the tent like Abram. In the tent, like Abram, we may feel fear, anxiety, and concern about the reality we are experiencing. Covid-19 has been going on for over two years. Looking at the data on the CDC website recently, it seems that the area we live in has gotten a lot better from Covid-19. However, war broke out at a time when we must recover and promote unity. Soldiers are pointing guns at each other, and the news shows us videos of Russian tanks being smashed by missiles. When I first came to Wisconsin, regular gas prices were \$2.09, but now they are \$4. We are experiencing war directly or indirectly. In a reality that is not getting better, some might say: “God, are you alive?”

Whenever we feel fear, anxieties, and uncertainty in life like Abram, the Lord tells us “Do not be afraid, I'm here with you now,” “Don't worry, but remember that I give you peace and courage,” “Don't worry, but believe that I love you.”

Beloved: I hope that we will shake off our fears and worries and come out of our tents. I want us to see the countless stars in the night sky and believe in God's creation. I hope that we will overcome the difficulties we face and hold on to the word of the Lord and continue to keep our faith. May the grace and peace of the Lord be with us so we overcome the worries, fears, anxieties, limitations, and uncertain futures that all realities cause us to feel. Amen.