

Sermon Title: “Seeing with the Eyes of the Heart”

Proper 14 | Genesis 15:1–6 • Psalm 33:12–22 • Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16 • Luke 12:32–40

Come Holy Spirit, open the eyes of our hearts and speak to us today. In the name of the Holy and Living God: Creator, Christ, and Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Friends, we gather this morning in a moment of history that feels uncertain and heavy with dread.

If you’re like me, so many things are happening so quickly that I’m left spinning and wondering what’s next. What I see is that the common good has become favor for the few. Political divisions are now moral chasms. Corruption, violence, and injustice are growing exponentially. Climate disruption is no longer future tense. And a frightening, virulent form of “Christianity” is extending its reach.

I swing between hope that maybe, somehow, truth and justice will prevail; then there’s deep disappointment and despair when they don’t. It feels like the bottom has dropped out and I’m not sure if the other shoe has dropped yet.

I find myself asking questions like:

Where is this headed? How does it end?

Who can I trust? Where is the truth?

What is the future for our children, our communities, our planet?

And, into this current reality, we hear the words of Jesus this morning: ***“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”***

Everyone is living out of some kind of vision. We may not name it that way. But our actions always reveal what we believe to be true. The way we spend our money. The way we spend our time. The way we treat one another. What we prioritize. What we fear. These are all guided by what we see—or think we see.

Research in psychology and neuroscience has found that the human brain tends to dwell on negative experiences more than positive ones. Negative events have a stronger impact on our thoughts and memories. This makes them more influential in our vision and decision-making. Basically, we’re hardwired for negativity. Finding positives to reflect on takes a lot more work.

Yet, as people of faith, our circumstances challenge us and ask us to hold on to the good we know, but can’t see.

Thankfully, today’s Scriptures give us examples of how to keep our faith from being overwhelmed in troubling times.

In **our Genesis reading**, God comes to Abram in a time of uncertainty. Abram has no heir, no land, and no clear future. He’s camped out—pondering what’s happened. He’s followed God’s calling to go, but God hasn’t delivered on the promise of descendants. Despair is setting in. You see, in the culture of Abram’s time, having an heir was crucial for continuing one’s lineage and legacy. When he first responded to God’s call, God promised that Abram

would become a great nation. Now he's without an heir and the reality of aging is staring him in the face. The prospect of his estate passing to a servant seems to be the mostly scenario. If this happened, it would signify a failure of God's promise that he would become the father of a great nation. Following God's call, something that he had staked his life on, was feeling like a disaster.

It's into this situation that God shows up and says, ***"Do not be afraid."*** Then God takes Abram on an outdoor astronomy lesson and says, ***"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able."*** Abram doesn't see a child, a household, a great nation. What he sees is a sky full of stars.

If you've ever been stargazing, especially on a clear, dark night, you know that seeing the stars, planets and distant galaxies is an incredibly awe inspiring experience. And it's in this context that God addresses Abram's thoughts about his future...again promising him that he would have descendants.

What is God really doing here? Besides nudging Abram about the unfulfilled promise, God is expanding Abram's **vision**—teaching him how to see, not just with his eyes, but with his **heart**. All Abram could see was the logical outcome of his current circumstances. But God gives him a vision of something unseen: descendants, legacy, covenant. God is stretching his imagination and opening his eyes to the stars—a reality that he can see every night that will remind him of God's promise...even when and **most** especially when, he doubts.

His renewed faith is so different from the despair of envisioning an outcome that meant God had failed.

Writer Anne Lamott comments about faith this way: *The opposite of faith is not doubt, but **certainty**. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns.*

In the movie, the Conclave, the Cardinal Lawrence character says...There is one sin I have come to fear above all others, **CERTAINTY**. Our faith is a living thing, precisely because it walks hand-in-hand with doubt. If there was only certainty and no doubt, there would be no mystery and therefore, no need for faith.

Many of us are attracted to **certainty**. I know I am. I love finding clarity, resolution, and closure. Figuring it out—that’s how I orient my life. But faith doesn’t necessarily work that way. In fact, certainty diminishes the need for faith.

In our reading today, Abram doesn’t get certainty. He receives a promise, an invitation to trust. No map, no blueprint, just stars in the sky and the words, **“Do not be afraid.”**

To take this back a bit further, today’s reading from Hebrews says that when Abram was originally called to go to the place of his inheritance, he “set out, not knowing where he was going.”

Think about that. Going someplace and not knowing where or to what future. When we feel like things would be better with some certainty, this sounds like a crazy pursuit. But that’s not irresponsibility—**that’s faith**. Abram’s actions—leaving his culture and his land, believing the promise, trusting the journey—

were not based on what he saw. They were based on what he was convinced of. He trusted God's voice enough to move. He believed enough to act.

A few years ago, I went through a very challenging season of life. Everything in my life pretty much came undone...and I did, too. I found myself in a place I rarely inhabited and hadn't chosen to visit. I couldn't see my future. Nothing was clear. I felt like God was quite removed my reality. I had no idea what was coming next or what to do. The "secure" future I had envisioned was gone. The only thing I could do was stay present and take just the next step that appeared—not knowing where it would lead. Maybe you've had an experience like that, too.

Cynthia Bourgeault tells us that this is the path of the heart. Not the heart defined as sentiment or emotion—but the heart as the organ of spiritual perception. *The heart is that place within us that can "hold the tension of opposites" and stay open in the middle of unknowing.*

In other words: **The heart is where mystery and trust live side by side.**

And right now, mystery is all around us.

We don't know what the future will bring.

We don't know how climate change will unfold.

We don't know what kind of society we will become.

Maybe that's why the mystery of faith matters *more than ever*.

Because if we wait to act until we have full clarity, we will do nothing.

But if we let ourselves be convinced—not by evidence, but by faith—then we will move, like Abram did. Faith allows us to keep trusting—trusting God's presence, God's love, God's justice and mercy. And trusting that God is

present in every circumstance...even when we can't see the outcome or how it will come together.

But here's our real challenge:

How can we envision God's dream when we can't see it?

When all we see is division and decline and danger?

That's when we need faith like Abram. That's when we remember that faith is not about certainty, it's about trust. It's about the conviction of things not seen. The willingness to step forward regardless. To go outside, like Abram did, and look up—just because God said so.

Even when we don't see clearly, we can still practice faith. Because faith is not about having the whole picture. It's about aligning ourselves with God's vision—step by step, day by day.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells his followers:

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit.”

“Be like those who are waiting for their master to return.”

This is not naïve optimism. It is subversive trust. Jesus calls us to **stay awake**, to **keep watch**, to remain **vigilant** for the unexpected movements of the Spirit. Faith is not a settled answer—it is a **continual readiness**.

God's dream is alive—**even now**—in the hard places, and **especially** in the hard places. And that means we don't retreat from the world's pain—we lean into it with faithful action.

So, how do we get out of our orientation toward negativity and align our vision with God's?

- We **listen deeply**—to scripture, to the cries of the world, and to our own inner stillness. We know God’s heart is always close to the poor and the marginalized.
- We **embrace the mystery**—not as something to solve, but as something holy to walk through.
- We **act in small, faithful ways**—even when we’re afraid.
- We **stay awake**—even when we’d rather disengage.

Faith is daily attentiveness—a readiness to respond, and a humility that remains open to God’s surprising work.

A proverb that has impacted me since I first heard it is this. Maybe you’ve heard it too...

“The best time to plant a tree was thirty years ago, the second-best time is today.”

This what it means to **act from faith**. Not despairing that we didn’t or couldn’t do anything years ago, but acting **now**.

Faith is about being ready for the next opportunity to love. The next moment to speak truth. The next chance to be light in a dark world.

This quote from the poet, Clarissa Pinkola Estes, says it well:

Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good.

We live in uncertain times. But so did Abram. So did the early church. And what carried them forward was not certainty or control or fear—**it was faith.**

So, as we close, I ask you:

When you can't see clearly—will you still plant trees?

When you doubt, will you still look at the stars?

When you have the means, will you still give?

In spite of your circumstances, will you still believe that God's kingdom is not just coming, but already *breaking in*?

Because even now—even here—God still says:

“Do not be afraid, little flock. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Friends, this is the life of faith.

May we step into the mystery.

May we live by the light we have.

And may we trust the One who calls us forward,
even when we cannot see the road.

Amen.