

13 February 2008
Lent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Torah Story”: Genesis – Beginnings and Promise

“Firsts” are always special. Ask any parent and they can probably tell you about many of the firsts in their children’s lives. The first crawl, the first step, the first word, the first smile, the first laugh. The first birthday, the first haircut, the first tooth, the first sickness. The first skinned knee, the first day of school, the first temper tantrum. The first rebellion, the first punishment, the first crush, the first night away. And this list of “firsts” could go on for a long, long time. And through it all, parents see in their children the promise of life, and wonder what they will become when they grow up. What will they accomplish, what will they dream, what will they do with their life? And sometimes – in the end – the result is joy, and sometimes it is disappointment.

As we read through the book of Genesis, there are a lot of “firsts” – as we should expect with the beginning of new life. For our heavenly Father created new life, a new man and woman, and a wonderful Garden for them to live in and explore and enjoy, and like earthly parents, delights in their firsts. His children first playing with creation and the animals; their first time swimming and splashing in the water; their first bite of wonderful food that explodes with flavor in their mouths. What joy they had, and what joy He must have had, watching them! . . . But like earthly parents, then, there was also the disappointment (if we can attribute that to God) – the first sin. When His children turned away from Him and followed their own course.

But while that first – the first sin – *effects* the rest of the book of Genesis, it is not what the book of Genesis is about. For Genesis is not about the promise of life wasted and thrown away by Adam and Eve, **but about the promise of life given by God after this sin.** The promise of God that He would not reject His children, that He would not abandon them to sin and death, but that He would rescue them. And this is the theme that now unfolds through the rest of Genesis – through the highs and the lows, the successes and the failures, the good times and the bad times. It is about a God is faithful to His promise, and His children who put their faith in Him.

And so Adam passes down the promise to his children, that they – who did not get

to experience the joy of Eden! – might cling to it and live. Abraham is called, and the promise is repeated to him, and “*he believed the Lord, and [the Lord] counted [his faith] to him as righteousness.*” The Father then reaffirms this promise to Isaac, and then to Jacob. And perhaps especially in Jacob we see the *graciousness* of this promise, for if there was anyone who did not deserve the favor and promise of God, it was Jacob! Jacob the “heel”, the deceiver, the thief, the greedy, the shyster, the disappointment. And we see that God does not choose us because of our goodness, but because He is merciful. The promise is then passed down from Jacob to his son Judah, but it is in *Joseph* where we see the *vastness* of God’s care and blessing, reaching to all men and nations. For our Lord truly *desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* (1 Tim 2:4)

And so Genesis is not only a book of “firsts”, but a book of *hope* – hope in the living God, and faith in His promise. Faith when things don’t look so good; faith when everything seems against you; faith when the earth is covered in water; faith when on the run from your blood-thirsty brother; faith when you have nothing; faith from a dungeon; faith when a knife is brandished over your beloved son on an altar; faith in the midst of famine; faith from a foreign land; faith in the face of great disappointment. Not that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph never failed and fell – they most certainly did, and at times spectacularly! But their Father and our Father never failed them. They did not always understand, they did not always stand firm, **but it wasn’t about them.** It never was. It was *for them.* God *for them.* His promise *for them.* His life *for them.*

And that is where you and I fit into “The Torah Story” in Genesis – **for this Father is your Father, and this promise your promise.** For it is the promise fulfilled in our Saviour and brother Jesus Christ, who came to rescue us. Though we (like our fathers) have failed our Father with many undesirable “firsts”, and much sin and rebellion, doubts and fears; though we have not remained steadfast, **He has.** Sending His Son in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4), to do what He purposed since the beginning of time (1 Pet 1:18-20) – to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That our sin be forgiven and separate us from our Father no more. That we be rescued from the death that our sin has caused. And that the old, evil foe that desires our destruction be instead himself destroyed. And our relationship with our Father, as His children, be restored.

And now in this promise *fulfilled* we put our faith and hope. The faith of our fathers is no different than our faith – we simply live on the other side of the cross. They

believed in a promise *made*, we believe in a promise *fulfilled*. But as for Abraham so for us all, it is by faith that we are counted righteous. Right with God. Forgiven. Restored. It is in Jesus that heaven is opened to us. It is on Jesus that the angels of God ascend and descend to us. It is in Jesus that we once again have the promise of life, and the delight of our Father in Heaven. For yes, He does delight in us. And not just in our “firsts.” He delights when we confess His Name in the Creed. He delights when we are baptized and our sins are washed away. He delights when we eat his body and drink His blood and His life and forgiveness explodes into us. He delights when we repent of our sins and seek His absolution. He delights when we trust in Him though dark our road, uncertain our future, and through difficult times. When we trust that no matter how things seem, that He is good, and His mercy endures forever (Ps 100).

That’s not easy. It wasn’t for all those folks in Genesis either! **But God hasn’t promised us easy – He has promised us good.** And that, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is what Genesis is all about. Our Father who created everything good, and who has promised to re-create everything good again. And that in His Son, *He has!*

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.