

Genesis 15: 3-6

And Abram said, 'You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.' 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.' He brought him outside and said, 'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Romans 4:1-3

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'

Romans 4: 9-12

Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, 'Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.' How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Romans 4: 16

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham for he is the father of all of us.

“Jesus Abrahamson”**Rev. Pam Everhart****February 10, 2008**

One of the hardest parts of preparing the sermon is trying to order the worship service, honestly, trying to pick out the hymns, because we try to make them fit. I don't know if that makes sense all the time or not, if you notice it, but we try to make them fit. I had the whole Monday staff trying to help me pick out the hymns, because there are not a lot of hymns that talk about Abraham and the faith of Abraham, and at one point David Dalke rushed in here to the Steinway and ripped the cover off. I didn't know that we were allowed to touch the Steinway. And I didn't touch the Steinway, but David did, and we're trying to pick out songs, because we didn't know the song, I didn't know that second song after the prayer, but it is a nice one. And so it's a journey, a progress that's hard to make sometimes. Abraham is in "Faith While Trees Are Still In Blossom." I don't know if he's anywhere else or not. If you see another reference to Abraham, you let me know. And thanks, David, for helping me with the Steinway. I'm not going to touch it.

I'm a fan of country music. I like Keith Urban and Brad Paisley and others in that generation and most people assume that's because I'm from Tennessee, but it's not. I didn't listen to country music until just a few years ago. I got into listening to that kind of music because I discovered that I guy I went to college with had made it big in country music. I went to college with Kenny Chesney. I didn't know Kenny Chesney at the time. I pretend I did. He was at East Tennessee State University in the late 1980s just like I was. He was in choir with my husband, so I do remember his face, and my husband pretends he knows him sometimes too, but he really doesn't. It was a really big choir. Anyway, I got into listening to country when I decided to listen to some of Kenny Chesney's music. One of the songs I discovered is still one of my favorite songs. It's called, "Back Where I Come From." Some of you might be familiar with that song. The song talks about what it's like to grow up in the country. One of the lyrics, says, "Back where you learn in Sunday School who made the sun shine through, and you know who makes the moonshine, too." That's "Back Where I Come From." We can talk about that part later. I love the song so much because I can close my eyes when I hear it, and I picture exactly what Kenny Chesney pictures when he sings it, because he grew up about thirty miles from where my hometown was, so I know he pictures the same people and places and hills of East Tennessee that I do.

You see, where we're from matters. We might move away from it, as I have, but our culture, our way of doing things, our religion, our families, our ancestors, all of the matters. It affects everything about who we are, and why we think and act the way we do. Whether you're your parents' biological child or whether you're their child through adoption, you connection to this family, to that family you call yours, and where they're from, connects you to who are. It matters to all of us now, who are your forefathers and foremothers who came before you. It also mattered in Jesus' day. I would say even still today, as in Jesus' day, the names on your family tree and the places that you identify as home, make you either more or less legitimate in claiming your own place in the world, whatever that might be.

Wednesday night we had Ash Wednesday service here, and Rev. Schuster began our Lenten journey with a look at what's in a name, and we're going to continue that theme in the weeks to come, speculating on what Jesus' last name might be – meaning, who was Jesus related to, or who did the Biblical writers try to connect Jesus to. For example, in the Christmas readings, which were just a few short weeks ago, we hear of Jesus being from the house and lineage of David. That would be Jesus Davidson. That's for another day, maybe somebody will preach that one, I don't know. Today, however, I want to focus on Jesus' link to Abraham, and the often-overlooked Jewishness of Jesus, so the Jesus I refer to today is Jesus Abrahamson.

I became interested in Jesus Abrahamson as a result of the Wednesday Bible study I'm leading, called "Invitation to Romans." Some of you here are in that class, and in the participant book, we have an alternative reading of Paul's letter the Romans, written by one of my former professors at the Iliff School of Theology, Dr. Pam Eisenbaum. Pam is a Jewish woman, and she's also a professor of New Testament, and she's particularly

interested in the apostle Paul. As Chuck mentioned in the announcements, she'll be here Tuesday night at 7 in the Parlor, and you really should come and hear her. She's fascinating to listen to. One of the themes of what she's, going to say, I think, next door, and what the study addresses is the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in Jesus' time and in Paul's time, and thereby, what is our relationship as Jews and Christians today. There's a scholar on the video that goes with the class materials, Bill Leonard, who's from Wake Forest University, and he points out something that we often overlook in the Christian tradition, something that he calls the Jewishness of Jesus, stating the obvious, but of course, Jesus wasn't Christian. Jesus was a faithful Jew, from all accounts. Jesus challenged the established religion not because it was Jewish, but because it was being practiced in ways that, to Jesus, seemed incompatible with the vision God had for Israel.

Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles, he proclaims himself that, in Romans, and he's attempting to tell them just where Jews and Gentiles stand with God and with one another, and to do this one thing he uses is a method of connecting back to ancestry. Paul makes mention of David in Romans, of Adam, and in today's text, Abraham. Paul wants to make sure that Abraham connection is made, for the people who read this letter, or hear this letter. Connection to Abraham today, of course, could mean you're Jewish, it could mean you're Muslim, it could mean you're Christian, but in this time, the time that this letter was written, it clearly connected you to the Jewish faith. Abraham is central to the Jewish faith, the father of the people of Israel. Then Paul throws a curve ball in what Abraham's role is. Paul shows the church in Rome and I guess later the world, the link between Jew and Gentile. The first link comes from Abraham, Abraham and his faith. Paul says in Romans 4 that Abraham's faith did not depend on his obedience to the law, but the faith he shows in God prior to the law. Paul tells us in the Genesis scripture I read that Abram falls on his face before God, and that's before circumcision. Paul says this proves that law is not required for faith. Law is not required to be justified in the eyes of God, and if the law is not required to have faith, then that must mean that the Gentiles are open to the promise too. Abraham is indeed the father of the Jewish people, but through his faith, and Paul would say, later through the faith of Christ, he's father to the Gentiles. We're related, we share a father.

What's in a name matters. Who you are matters. So Jesus is Jewish, we have no doubts about that. Jesus calls Abraham father. Jesus calls the people of Israel his brothers and sisters. Let's not forget that. Paul likens the faith of Abraham with the faith of Christ. He links them in this letter to the Romans. You see, Abraham's faith led to that covenant that God promised, and in the covenant, God says, "You will have a multitude of nations following you." And of course, that covenant that God made with Abraham leads to a people, the Israelites, who were resurrected time and time again, through Moses, through their own perseverance, through their faith in God, a people who remain the people of Israel, the people of the one God. Abraham's faith before law sets the stage for the Gentiles, and Paul tells us it's then that Jesus' faith really flings the door wide open for the rest of us. Paul explains that Jesus had had faith before anything else happened. Jesus had to have faith that, in spite of the dark path that he must have known was laid before him, that God would live up to God's promises. And so it is Jesus' own faith, Jesus' own

obedience, even unto death, that's the faith that offers us a resurrection life, that offers us a new chance, and a grace abundant.

My husband and I were trying to select a name for our son before he was born, and we wanted to choose a strong name, you know, we don't want a name that's going to get him beat up at recess. So we decided on Jake. We thought that was strong and cool, and now I know a lot more dogs named Jake than I did before that, but still, it's a fun-loving name for a guy, I think. And Jake really does like his name. It really was Jacob, but he doesn't like to be called that, only Jake. That's a nice name, a strong name. The other day at school however, a girl came up to him and said, "Your name should not be Jake. You don't look like a Jake, you don't act like a Jake. I like the name Jake. You shouldn't be Jake." So I guess that's the philosophy of a middle-school student to another.

But what our names are does matter. Who we come from matters. Who and what we're connected to does make a difference, in the way we see the world and the way we move in it. Recently my family took a trip to LA. My son's going to be a movie star one day, he says, so we had to go scope it out. That's really the truth. My dad has an old high-school classmate, got on a bus in 1960 in Knoxville, Tennessee, and headed for the West Coast, and he's still there. And my dad said, "You need to look up Paul when you go out there." Ironic that his name is Paul, I'm preaching about Paul today. "He's lived there for years. Look him up." So I did. I looked up Paul, and I said, "Hi, I'm Vernon Wilder's daughter." That's all he really needed to know. That was his link. You see, to him it doesn't matter if I'm Pam Everhart. He doesn't see me as Pam Everhart, or even as Pam Wilder, which I once was. You see, to him, I'm Pam Vernonschild. He connected me to his past. He connected me to good times with my dad, and he connected me to the hills of east Tennessee where he grew up. It helped him to get a really really good look into who I am, in a way that perhaps I cannot even see myself. The power in being named and defined by whom we connect to and whom we come from, that's priceless, and electric. Who do you connect to? Whose child are you. Where do you come from? It shapes everything about who you are and how you live. It's deep in your pores, rushing through your veins. We all have a sense of people and a sense of place, a connection to the world that's uniquely ours. This Lenten season I invite you to spend some time reflecting on your sense of place in the world. Pause to be thankful for those who have nurtured you and those who still are. Pause to reflect on how you live and move and have your being, and just how that connects to those who came before you. Also, work on the connection that you have to Jesus, the connection that you have to Jesus, son of Abraham. Abraham, faithful servant to the one God. See how you connect to Jesus Abrahamson, Jesus the faithful, Jesus, our Savior. Amen.