

Sermon for February 21, 2016
"How am I to Know?"

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

"How do you know that he loves you?" In the Disney movie "Enchanted" that is the question that leads into a big musical number. In the song the answer to the question is more about the little things people who are romantically involved do for each other. The answer is the little things like writing notes and sending gifts and such. That is how we know someone loves us.

But if you stop and think about it, we all do things to demonstrate our love to others. We give hugs and kisses and handshakes and pats of the back. We check on friends when we know they may need some help. We go out of our way to way to send them cards or notes or give them phone calls on important days in their lives.

Sometimes we even make promises and even take vows. We say, "I've got your back." Or "just call and I will be there," or "No matter how old you get you will always be my child." Sometimes the vows are serious: "Until death us do part." Even children will say, "Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye" to seal a promise made in friendship and love.

How do we know?

That was Abraham's question. "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" You see Abraham was dying. I mean the guy was on the far side of 100. And Sarah was not far behind. God had said that he would be the father of a nation.

But how can you be a father with no children? And how can you be a nation with no land? It seemed that the butler, Eliazer, would inherit all his possessions and legacy. And what would become of him?

But God said, "Don't be afraid. I've got your back Abram. I will take care of you. Just call and I'll be there. You will have children and land and it will all happen like I said."

But Abraham still worried: "How am I to know?"

So God made a vow or in Biblical language; a covenant. The Almighty sealed the promise with a demonstration of how serious he was. The problem is that the symbolic language used is about 4,000 years old, so it is lost on most modern people. Abraham brings heifers and goats and rams and birds and cuts them in two and lays them out: a sacrifice. Then he waits. Then God

appears as fire and smoke and passes between the cut up animals.

What does all that mean? Keep in mind this was all in a time before written contracts and lawyers and notary publics. In the language of the 20th century BC, God is making a promise and showing how serious the Almighty is about that promise. By passing between the severed halves of the animals the Lord is saying "If I break my promise may what happened to these animals happen to me." Or in a language we are more familiar with "Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye."

And so God seals the deal with Abraham. God reassures Abraham that He will have his back and that all that He said will come true. Yes, Abraham had joined the centenarians club and his picture was even on Good Morning America. But he will have offspring. And even though he has wandered his whole life, his descendants would inherit the land that would later be called Israel. That's how he is to know!

How are we to know? We are all dying. Not just physically. We are dying spiritually. The wages of sin is death and we have all sinned.

God promised to save us to take away our sin. God said that we would have a place in Heaven; and in God's glory and peace in the here and now. The Bible says that we are children of God and heirs to glory. But I don't look like an heir to glory. I mean I try to be good, but often I fail: and fail miserably!

How are we to know that God will keep God's word? What assurance do we have? How do I know that God really loves me?

So, as with Abraham, God says "I will show you how serious I am. Meet me on a green hill outside the city wall. This time I will bring the sacrifice." And God appeared in his Son. And between two sinners the Son was nailed to a cross. And there Jesus bled and died to seal the deal that saves us.

And God said, "This is how much I love you. This is how serious I am about my promises. I would rather die than not have you come to heaven and be with me. I am giving my life so that you can be heirs to the kingdom of God."

How do I know that God loves me? God sent the only begotten Son to show me in his life and teachings. And Jesus died on the cross for my sins. And I have the assurance that God will keep the promises to forgive my sin and give me eternal and abundant life. And the cross is a sign of that promise!

That's how I know He loves me!