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Pentecost 9 – Genesis 15:1-6 – God’s Love Is Deeper than the Ocean
8/3-7/22 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

This week at Vacation Bible School we learned about the ocean and some really amazing fish that live there, and then connected that to some important lessons about God and how much he loves us. It was fun to share some facts about each of those fish with the VBS kids and see how they reacted, but there are some pretty amazing facts to learn about the ocean itself, too.

For example, did you know that water covers 71% of the earth’s surface, or 139.5 million square miles? Pretty long and wide, right? Did you know that the deepest point of the ocean is almost 36,000 feet, close to 7 miles straight down? I’d say that’s pretty deep. Or did you know that there is a total of 326 million trillion gallons of water on earth? That’s enough to make water the most abundant substance in the entire world.

But as awesome and amazing as the ocean is, as many love songs and heartbreak remedies have been written about it, even longer, even wider, even deeper, even more abundant is the love of God our Savior for us, his people. That’s what we’ve been learning about this week, and that’s what Abram learned in our First Lesson from God’s Word for today. To a man who was overcome by worry and fear and anxiety came the Word of the LORD, with promises of peace and grace that would wash over anything that ailed him. So dear friends, just as Abram did that day, so also today and every day know that God’s love is deeper than the ocean – even when the waves are crashing and it feels like you’re drowning, God will always be there to save you.

Now our story picks up in Genesis 15 when Abram was really down and worrying about his family and his future. See, the Lord had promised him a decade earlier, “*Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*” (Genesis 12:1-3). It was a wonderful promise – but how could God keep it? Abram was 85 years old and childless. How was he supposed to become a great nation if he couldn’t even have one child? But then the Word of the Lord came: “*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.*” When the LORD says there’s no reason to fear, what could possibly prove him wrong? Who could

possibly beg to differ? Maybe from our human perspective it might seem like there are reasons to fear, but not when we have the almighty God as our shield and reward. See, all throughout his life, Abram had been a traveling nomad living in tents who never truly had a home of his own and was constantly in danger from bandits and armies and wild animals and bad weather and who knows what else. But no – the LORD God was his shield to protect him against anything that would harm him, and to never leave him or forsake him wherever he went. The LORD God was his very great reward that nobody and nothing could take away from him – a living, loving, personal relationship with the true God (who else could say that?!) and the hopeful expectation to live with him in heaven forever. And the LORD God had promised that Abram would become a great nation, that his descendants would inherit that land, and that one day the Savior would come from his bloodline. So how could God’s promises fail? They couldn’t, and that meant until those promises were fulfilled, Abram had nothing to be afraid of.

And my friends, know that those same godly guarantees are yours nowadays, too. God is also *your* shield and *your* very great reward. In fact, Psalm 46 says, “*we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*” With the love of God surrounding us, who made the oceans and whose voice even the winds and waves obey, our lives are a win-win no matter what happens – and that’s something not even threats from Russia or China, not even uncertainty about our government and the economy, not even loneliness or confusion or frustration can change. God’s love is deeper than the ocean, dear friends, because he is your shield, he is your very great reward, he is the wave-breaker of your lives and eternities, and he is the one who goes with you wherever you and your loved ones go.

And as tough as it may be to swallow sometimes, that’s true even when life makes it feel like you’re drowning. And that’s really what Abram was struggling with here. God promised that through Abram, the Messiah would come. But he was 85 years old at this point, and his wife was 75. Even back in those days when lifespans were longer, that didn’t offer a whole lot of hope for being able to have children if it didn’t happen yet up to that point. And as the days and years ticked by and childbearing age seemed further and further back in the rearview, that water must’ve just seemed to keep rising higher and higher.

Abram must have wondered and wondered and wondered and wracked his brain trying to figure this whole thing out, to no avail. But all that time, what God was doing was *training* him and *teaching* him to be patient, to be content, and to trust. He was teaching him that when the LORD speaks, he is *always* faithful because that's who he is – the L-O-R-D, the God who is absolutely and unfailingly faithful to his promises, the God whose love for us is deeper than the ocean! You might not see it, you might not expect it, you might not understand it – but just because the way he might do things is different from the way we might do things doesn't mean he's wrong. In fact, it means his way of doing things is so much better than we can comprehend and his purposes are so much higher than we can imagine.

So after Abram poured his heart out here, then the Word of the LORD came to him once more: “*A son coming from your own body will be your heir... Look up at the heavens and count the stars [and sometime later God would add also “the sand on the seashore”]... So shall your offspring be.*” No, God's promise to Abram wasn't about some servant in his household. Truly, his heir would be his own flesh and blood, one who would make descendants for him as countless as the stars in the sky – physical descendants, yes; but more importantly, spiritual descendants who shared Abram's faith, precious souls that would be beautiful and bright and would shine like stars in the darkness of this sinful world. And his descendants would be able to do that by faith in The Descendant, Jesus Christ.

See, he's the one that makes sense of a world that so often doesn't. He came into a world that is so often wrong in order to make it right again. He came to a people whose sin deserved death and instead delivered forgiveness and life. When he saw us drowning under the weight of our sins, he came to dive in after us and bring us back up to heaven with him. He's the one that proved once and for all that God's love for you is wider and longer and deeper and more abundant than even the ocean itself, and that means there is no danger or evil, no frustration or difficulty, no bad news or tragedy in this world that can overcome it. In those times of trouble, God's answer to you is the same as his answer to Abram: just trust me. In Isaiah 43, God promised his people, “*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you,*” and he still makes that same promise to you. Now those waters might feel uncomfortably high some days, but no

matter what, God's love surrounds us like a life jacket, always preserving us, always uplifting us, always keeping us close to him until we finally make it home to heaven to be with him forever.

Yes, I know that sometimes life in this world can seem to make no sense at all – probably about as much sense as it made for those people watching Jesus die on the cross. Their Lord was murdered, their hope was lost, their faith seemed futile – until he rose again. And in that morning's light everything that was darkness before suddenly made sense. God was faithful to his promises, he did what he had to do to save us, and his love was seeing us through to heaven. No, maybe Abram didn't *understand*. But he *believed*, and God delivered when 15 years later his son Isaac was born and some 2000 years later, his greater son Jesus Christ was born. Maybe the disciples didn't understand either, but then Jesus rose and put all their fears to rest. And so also you too, my friends, see and believe that God's love is deeper than the ocean – he can bring you through your hurricanes, help you pick up all the pieces, and deliver you safely to the calm on the other side – because his Word hasn't yet failed, he *always* makes good on his promises, and his words bring righteousness and peace and life.

And you know, that's really the whole point of this lesson. The last verse here says, “*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*” Even when the waves are crashing, even when it feels like you're drowning, even when everything seems to be so wrong, faith in the true God is what makes it all right – for now and forever. We could never be right with God on our own, so Jesus came to *make* us righteous in God's sight by his perfect life, death, and resurrection for us. And *that* – that reminds me of one last amazing thing about the ocean. With just how wide and long and deep and absolutely vast the ocean is, did you know that even to this day with all our modern advances in technology and travel and research, more than eighty percent of the ocean remains totally unmapped, unobserved, and unexplored? Well that just makes it all the more striking and all the more meaningful when God promises that through faith in Jesus our Savior, he hurls all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. That means our sins are gone and never coming back. That's how much our God loves us – with a love that is deeper than the deepest ocean, with a love that calms the waves in our lives and saves us from going under, with a love that will not quit until he finally brings us home to Paradise to be with him forever. Amen.