

Men's Night – June 2023
Genesis 17:1-14
Romans 4:13-25

Apparently, the Southern Baptists are enduring a difficulty that has affected a great many Christian denominations over the last sixty years or so. Their church body, as a whole, is trying to hold the line against the ordination of women, but one of their celebrity pastors has broken ranks. Conflict is a part of life but it is very few people's favorite cup of tea. Conflict surrounded Jesus. Truth doesn't go looking for conflict but this is a fallen world. This fallen world is full of fallen men who have an alarming affinity for what is false and little or no embarrassment about promoting it. The celebrity pastor's name who has changed his mind regarding women's ordination is Rick Warren and he has a large, influential congregation in Lake Forest called Saddleback Church. He recently ordained three women in direct opposition to the Southern Baptist teaching. The Missouri-Synod is certainly not immune to such actions.

I was at a wedding last Friday in the heartland. I had a brief chat with two young lads, both of whom were adopted by their parents. They are elementary-school-age children. The older boy wants to be either a chemical engineer or a marine biologist. Both of them are clear-eyed, respectful, and patient with adults who want to pepper them with questions. My father was a chemical engineer. When I mentioned this to Gavin, it afforded me a few more minutes of his time. One of the maxims that was regularly voiced in our household is this: "with great power comes great responsibility." I asked Gavin if he knew who said it. I was expecting "Spiderman" or Uncle Ben but he said Tom Holland, which is technically correct. The reason that I brought this maxim to his mind is that when one is gifted in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) then it is almost a moral requirement to use those gifts to contribute to the advancement of society because so few of us excel at such things. I then asked him if he knew the Christian basis for this maxim. He didn't, so I got to lay one on him, which he seemed to appreciate. "To whom much is given, much is expected" (Luke 12:48).

Do you think that it is hubris for me to say that, just in regard to your gender, you have been given much? You are a man. There are things that are asked of you that are not asked of women. The head of the household, the historic bread-winner, the defender of the weak, the nation's warriors, the one who is to love his wife like Christ loved the church, the one who is to represent Christ to the congregation, the holder of the Office of the Keys. To whom much is given, much is expected. Is that you? Do you take that statement from Christ's lips seriously? Are men eager to carry that mantle or are they eager to cast it off? What are the repercussions if men cast off their calling to lead, their calling to sacrifice, their calling to be precisely what God has designed them to be? There are plenty of forces at work in the world that want you to stop being what God has designed you to be. Oftentimes, there is a short-term perquisite that is offered to men when they give up God's design. Rick Warren is being celebrated in some circles for his supposed bravery in ordaining women to the Office of Holy Ministry.

If a female pastor is genuinely contrary to our Lord's will, one has to consider the validity of any act by done by a person who is not designed for such a station. God intentionally made Adam first and then drew the delightful Eve from Adam's side. As the second, greater Adam, the Lord Christ was and is male. All of the apostles, whom Jesus called deliberately, were male. How

does a female serve as Christ's representative in the Office of the Holy Ministry? Men and women aren't interchangeable. We were made to be different. God told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. There were all kinds of reasons for Abraham not to believe God. There was no tangible evidence to go along with this promise. Abraham was, at that time, childless, his wife was post-menopausal, and yet God told Abram that the stars in the night sky would be short of his offspring. Then the book of Genesis gives us this priceless line: "[Abram] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Believe God. Believe His Word. Believe that Christ's righteousness is reckoned to you as a gift when you simply believe that the Holy One of Israel has redeemed you by His blood, that the Crucified Christ has conquered death, that all your sins have been paid for, that Jesus rose from the dead, that you are loved of the Father, that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the law in all of its parts, that the church is the body of Christ, that baptism now saves you, that Jesus gives you His body to eat and His blood to drink, that Satan is a defeated enemy, that death has no sting, that nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, that the Lord will return to claim His bride, that He will raise all the dead and give them a glorified body, that He will create a new heaven and a new earth, that Jesus Himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Abraham is the father of all the faithful, including you. You men are the sons of Abraham.

He had some pretty disappointing moments. He lied; repeatedly. He feared for his life and he lied and he put others in danger, principally his wife. Good golly, can you imagine putting your wife in danger, out of fear for your own skin? Abraham was a man, like you. Abraham has shining moments of great heroism – rescuing Lot from being a POW, obeying God in offering Isaac at Mt. Moriah, beginning with leaving his land and his family when the Lord called him to leave Ur of the Chaldees and head to Canaan. Abraham has less than stellar moments, moments of weakness and doubt and fear. And God was with him throughout it all. God is with us as well. We are sons of the New Covenant in Christ's blood. We walk by faith in this age. St. Paul wrote this: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13). Immediately after Jesus told the parable where the final line was "to whom much is given, much is expected," He explained that He had not come to bring peace, but division (Luke 12:49-53).

Division is all around us. But in this place we are a band of brothers, tied to one another by the crimson tether of Christ's blood. Here, Jesus' authority is the bond that keeps us tied to one another and to all our brothers and sisters in the faith. We are sons of grace, sons of the resurrection, sons to whom much has been given. Our unity is treasured. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity" (Psalm 133:1). St. Paul tells us that when God credited to Abraham a righteousness by faith, a righteousness that He didn't earn, a righteousness that is abundant and eternal and divine, that God was saying that for our sake as well (Romans 4:23). We believe that Jesus is raised from the dead. On the cross He paid for our trespasses. On Easter, the Lord Christ was raised for our justification. From eternity, the Son of God was begotten of the Father. Much was given to Him. Much was expected. Much was sacrificed. Much was achieved. Much was returned to the Father. Much is delivered to you. Let that sink in as you consider what it is to be a man.