

God's promises, God has an incredible promise for Abraham and Sarah, nearly a hundred years old and they're going to have a child. Can you imagine on a lot of different levels. I find that's really pretty difficult to imagine and yet here it is, the promise that they'll have a child and through that child there will be many nations. Now along with that promise in genesis, we also find that there's something else that comes with it, a change of name Abraham, because Abraham becomes Abraham and Sarah becomes Sarah. Part of what's significant in this is that our names, your name and my name, our names are important. They identify who they are and God knows your name will be taking a closer look at God's promises and the importance of names as we continue our series today on stories in stained glass during these weeks as we prepare for Easter on April [inaudible], we're taking a look at the symbols and the signs that we find in the stained glass here in the sanctuary built over almost 90 years ago, and these stories in glass have continued to be signs of faith for us.

And so today we're going to be taking a closer look at, on the balcony level. You probably can't see them where you are today, a seated right now, but you can take a look at them on the screen and we'll invite you to take a look, um, later today or later in the week. Last week, we took a look on the west side and the balcony. Today we're going to look on the east side. And on the north side, I'm on the balcony level. So the first symbol for us to take a look at his chest pendant, this is something that the high priest of Israel wore, they wore it on a right in front of them as a breastplate. They weren't, um, during significant worship events and times when they went into the holiest of holies, it was a piece of, uh, uh, religious symbolism. And we find that on the north side at Bryant and the stairwell is where you'll find this image and we hear a description of it.

In Exodus, I hear these words from Exodus Chapter Twenty eight, make an embroidered chest pendant used for making decisions, making the style of the vest using gold, blue and purple, and deep red yarns and fine twisted linen. It will be square and doubled nine inches long and nine inches wide. Set in it, four rows of gemstones. You can see them here. The first, uh, the first row will be a row of Carnelian Topaz in emerald stones. The second will be a row of Turquoise, a sapphire, and a moonstone. The third row will be adjacent. Then a agate, an amethyst. The fourth row will be a barrel, an onyx and the Jasper they're setting will be made of decorative gold. There'll be [inaudible] stones with names corresponding to the names of Israel's sons. They will be engraved like official seals each with its name for the 12 tribes.

Yeah.

Now much has been written about the stones that are described here and some disagreement about among scholars about exactly what are the stones that are referenced to two. And today I'd like to invite you to consider it, not the significance of the stones or the colors, but the significance of what was inscribed on them, on each of these 12 stones is inscribed, one of the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. These are all of the descendants of Abraham and in them as a represented each person because as you know now, even today were identified by the tribe that we're a part of. Sometimes that's our family tribe. Sometimes it's, uh, the tribe that we are connected with here at church. And sometimes it's something else who we cheer for, um, who, uh, we were, we find our place of work. There's all kinds of tribes. And in this case, this chest pendant that the priest wore to go into the very holiest place, the very place where God's presence was. They believed their names were inscribed.

Yeah.

And the names of the people who were in Israel. We're close to the heart of the priest. And part of what I believe that this helps teach us today is that our names are close to the heart of God.

Yeah.

In Isaiah, God says that his names are written on his hand and your name is important. Our names are important to God. They represent who you are. God's love is for the whole world. Yes, in general, but also in particular for each one of you and for each one of your neighbors and for each month of your family members and friends. God knows your name.

Yeah,

and this chess pendant tells the story of the people of Israel, the 12 tribes of Israel, and also served as a symbol for us that your name is important. God knows it and it is close to God's heart.

The next symbol for us to consider today is a symbol of a fish, but this image is located on the balcony level just inside the sanctuary. Um, it's a fish and a coin if you look closely in his mouth, but the fish, as you may know, is among the oldest Christian symbols. It was a symbol that those early believers of Jesus that they would share with one another, um, to let them know that they were also a believer at that time. As you know, it was not only illegal, but it was punishable by death if you are one who followed after Jesus. And so the fish was a symbol of being a follower of Jesus to those who didn't know, to the uninitiated, it may have just looked like decoration or symbol that was drawn and the dust. Um, but to those that didn't know it was a sign and a symbol of faith that lived inside of that person.

Yeah.

So I wonder what is a sign or a symbol of the faith that lives inside you?

Yeah.

Perhaps it's something that you wear a cross or, or another symbol of the faith. Maybe you have a fish or something else. What is it that represents your faith maybe in a physical way or perhaps not? For the early Christians, it was the symbol of a fish. We also might have signs and symbols that represent not only to those who are also believers, but also to other people that we indeed, um, seek to follow after Jesus. We hope that one of the signs of that in your own life, I started discipleship pathway that is unique to worship, grow, give, serve, and share that these actions might be signs and symbols to others that you are a follower of Jesus Christ.

Sure.

In this particular fish you'll see also a coin, um, and it's an interesting addition. It's a story perhaps that you may not be familiar with. And we hear this story of the fish and the coin. And Matthew chapter 17. I starting in Verse Twenty Four,

okay?

When they came to Capernaum, the people who collected the half shekel temple tax came to Peter and said, does your teacher pay the temple tax? Yes. He said, well, when they came into the house, Jesus spoke to Peter First. What do you think, Simon? For whom the earthly kings collect taxes from their children or from strangers, from strangers. He said, Jesus said to them, and the children don't have to

pay, but just so we don't offend them, go to the lake, draw out a fishing line and hook and take the first fish you catch. When you open its mouth, you will find a shekel coin, take it and pay the tax for both of us. Now, this is an interesting story. I don't know about you. I'm not much of a fisherman, but with the time that I have gone fishing, I've never found a coin in a fish that I've caught.

Maybe. Maybe you have. Um, this story is an interesting one and I think it teaches us a couple of things. Um, at least one thing for how we might live a life of faith today. At that time it was part of the, the understanding of, of, of, of the religious leaders at the time that you had to pay a tax when you came to the temple. Now Jesus is describing to his disciples, he said, you know, we, we don't really have to pay the tax. We have a different way, a way of following God's kingdom that maybe that's not necessary and yet,

yeah,

so that we don't cause others to lose their faith. We're going to pay in which Jesus is doing. Here is he's encouraging his disciples to say, let's not be a stumbling block for someone else. If others see us not paying the tax, perhaps it will be a challenge for them. And they'll say, well, what's going on here? And he says, for the sake of other people,

yeah,

let's pay the temple tax and here's how it will be provided for.

Yeah.

So just as with, uh, the, the, the breastplate as a symbol of God's name, Our Name, close to God's heart. This might also be a symbol for us. Try to avoid what might get in the way of someone else's faith. Try to avoid what might get in the way of someone else's faith. Surely, you know, examples of people that didn't fit things or acting in ways where you think, how could it be that they claim to be a Christian and yet they're acting this way or that they say these things. And then maybe perhaps it began to question, what is this all about anyway?

Yeah.

Maybe you found yourself in that place.

Okay,

so the fish in the coin reminds us let it's not act in a way that causes someone else's faith would be challenged. The fish, the coin, the next image, and stained glass. I just just past the media computer before you come to the door, is the arc during the flood. Of course, you're probably familiar with the story of the ark of Noah and the flood. Let's hear some of the highlights from genesis chapter six and continued with the first chapter seven. The Lord saw that humanity had become thoroughly evil on the earth and that every idea their minds thought up was always completely evil. That's pretty bad, isn't it? That's pretty bad description of humanity. The Lord regretted making human beings on the earth and he was heartbroken. Okay? Laura said, I will wipe off of the land. The human race that I've created from human beings to livestock, to the crawling things to the birds in the sky is because I regret I ever made

them no, but asked for Noah. The Lord approved of him. God said to know where the end is coming for all creatures since they have fill the earth with violence, I'm now about to destroy them along with the earth, so make a wooden arc. Make an arc with nesting places and cover it inside and out with tar.

Yeah.

Male and female of every creature went in just as God had commanded him. Then the Lord close the door behind them. The flood remained on the earth for 40 days, the waters rose lifted the ark and it rode high above the earth. The waters rose and spread out over the earth and the Ark floated on the surface of the waters. This is what's depicted here. The Ark floated on the surface of the waters. That story continues that the flood becomes a promise. We'll talk about that some of the weeks ahead of the dove and the rainbow also depicted here in the sanctuary, but the promise that God cares for each one of us, that God cares for God's people, that God will provide for us when we face challenging times during the flood is a sign of God's provision and the sign of God's care about right and wrong, that we might live our lives in faithful ways. The Ark and the flood.

Yeah.

Then we'll move to some seeing loss that you may not have seen before. Some of the. These next two are in closets on the north side. I'm facing central. Um, it's in the closet on my left. Your right on the west side, um, is the star of Bethlehem. Um, perhaps appropriately so also there with a bunch of storage, uh, boxes and tote filled with our Christmas decorations. Now I think they're just happy to be happenstance that we put our Christmas decorations there, but the symbol is the star of Bethlehem. And you remember, of course the story of the Star is told in the gospel of Matthew and in in that story, the wise men see a star and it's a sign and a symbol of a king that was born and they go and they follow it. They follow it all the way to where Jesus is living and when they see the star, they fall down when they see the child or they fall down and worship him and offer their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh, and so the star reminds us that it was a place in the sky. It was a symbol. It was a direction. It was a guiding place at these wise. People could follow after it and they find Jesus.

Yeah,

the star is a symbol for them and it's a symbol for us that there are always milestones and markers and guidance and direction to help us find Jesus. Today what signs and symbols have lead you to Jesus? Maybe not a star in the sky, but perhaps something that you've experienced in your life, maybe a relationship that you've had with someone else has been a sign and a symbol, something that's helped lead you to Jesus. Maybe a conversation that you've had or maybe a sense of God. When you're reading the scripture, we're spending time in quiet. What is it that's been a sign and a symbol that's lead you to Jesus?

Yeah.

As we reflect on those symbols in our own lives, it's also a reminder that we too can help point others to Jesus. That when people look at us, they might see a way to someone that they may not have known before. They might see an example of God's love in you. That is a symbol that guides them on their journey to follow after Jesus. Maybe your friends and neighbors who maybe know that you go to church, maybe they don't and they can use something that makes them say it's just a little bit different.

Why do you say what you say or why do you put in your life the way that you do and you might be a star?

Yeah,

something that guys, others to Jesus, the star of Bethlehem reminds us of these things.

You finally, the last symbol for today is the image of the Lilly is on the north side. Um, if you've been in the closet where they have the HVHC controls the big air conditioning unit up there, that's where the symbol is located. Um, the lily, um, has been a symbol of purity innocence, um, for a long time and is also associated with mortality. Um, this particular species is notice the Easter Lily because of its association with Christianity and the resurrection. A legend tells us that after Jesus' death and resurrection, some of these beautiful flowers were found growing in the garden of Gethsemane and, and it said that where Jesus sweat and tears and blood fell when he was praying on that night and the garden at, this is where this flower sprung up.

Okay?

Now, we can certainly debate whether or not that legend is true, but perhaps more importantly when we look at that literally it can remind us that these words of Jesus from Luke Chapter Twelve,

yeah.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, therefore I say to you, don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or about your body, what you will, where there was more to life than food and more to the body. Then clothing. Consider the Ravens. They neither plant nor harvest. They had no silo or barn and God feeds them. You are worth so much more than birds. Who among you, by worrying can add a single moment to your life. If you can do such a small thing, why worry about the rest? Notice how the lilies grow. Jesus says they don't wear themselves out with work and they don't spin cloth, but I say to you that even Solomon in all his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these. If God addresses grasses in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will God do for you? You people have weak faith, don't chase after what you will eat and what you would drink. Stop worrying all the nations of the world long for these things your father knows that you need them instead, desire God's kingdom and these things will be given to you as well.

Desire God's kingdom first. The Lilly is a sign and a symbol that justice God cares for the birds, the plants, the animals, so also God cares for you and the call and the reminder is not to worry, not to worry so much because God cares for you. Sometimes I wish this for myself, that this symbol was a little bit more prominent. I liked the reminder not in the closet, but perhaps a little bit. Somewhere here I can see it more often. The lily reminds us that God cares for us, that God cares for you and will sustain you and difficult and exciting times. So these symbols remind us the stories of our faith. The breastplate that your name is written that close to God's heart. This fish and the coin reminding us, don't get in the way of the faith of other people. The Ark and the flood that God will care for us and it matters whether we choose right or wrong, the star of Bethlehem as a sign, the symbol that leads us to Jesus and that you also might be a sign and symbol that lead others to Jesus and the Lily Lily of the field. That's an example of the beauty of the care and the love that God has for you.

Okay?

Will you pray with me?

Yeah.

Oh God. We give you thanks for these stories in stained glass, we ask that you encourage and strengthen our faith. Remind us that we are called to follow after you. You love each one of us by name. We too might be assigned an assemble the lead other people to know your love. We offer you ourselves. Oh God. In Jesus' name. Amen.