

**March 12, 2006-Youth Sunday**  
**Mr. Brian Shivers, Director of Youth and College Ministries**

**"Fully Convinced"**

There she stands ... a precocious, mousy five year-old, clad in her brightly colored swimsuit and her yellow floaty vest.

There she stands, alone on the edge of the pool. Her mommy is in the shallow end with her arms outstretched, awaiting the arrival of her towheaded pride and joy. But for little Cameron, as she stands alone on the edge of the pool, her mommy might as well be a million miles away.

Cam and her mommy have rehearsed this a thousand times before here in the neighborhood pool. This exact scene has played out over and over again on many summer afternoons. Cam stands on the pool's edge. Mommy stands waist deep in the shallow end, waiting and encouraging Cam to jump. Each time however, at the moment of truth, Cam stands statuesque, precariously balanced on the side of the pool with her toes dangling over the edge. She just cannot seem to get herself to actually take the leap. It's not that she does not believe her mother when she says, "Jump honey. I will catch you." It's not that she does not think her mother loves her enough to make sure that she will be okay. It is just that she can think of a thousand reasons why she should not jump.

"There is all that water out there ... what if the water is cold ... what if I jump wrong ... what if I can't jump far enough for Mommy to catch me ... what if my head goes under the water ... what if I hit the bottom and never come back up ... what if there is something scary in the water that I can't see ... what if ... what if ..." Every time, the fears would get the best of Cam and she would go home disappointed.

But today is a new day. So there she stands once again, with butterflies in her stomach and heartbeat in her throat. Her mommy gently reminds her, "Don't be afraid. Go ahead and jump, honey. I am here. I will catch you." The little girl pauses, weighs her options, bends her knees and backs away. Moments later, she musters up enough courage and comes back to the side of the pool. The process begins all over again. Cam's nervous feet pitter-patter on the damp poolside. She weighs her options, looks around to make sure no one else is looking, bends her knees, gulps, pauses ... shakes her head and turns away once again. Tears fill her eyes as she feels like she may never be able to jump into the pool.

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Rewind several millennia. There we see Abraham as he is standing at the edge of his life. He is old, very old. As we heard this morning in our Old Testament Lesson, Abraham and his beloved wife, Sarah, just had a name-changing experience with the God of all things. God had spoken to this old man and said, "I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of you

and kings shall come from you" (Genesis 17:5-6). Then the God of the cosmos went on to say, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai; but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her" (Genesis 17:15-16).

Then something unusual happened, something that is nearly comical. When Abraham heard the promise of God, the story goes that Abraham fell on his face and laughed. This seemingly absurd word from the lips of the Divine made the patriarch of faith get a case of the giggles.

Think about it for a moment. The response does not seem all that odd when you consider the absurdity of the promise. Wouldn't you laugh, too, if you were told something such as this?

Here is a man nearly one hundred years of age and his wife is also several decades beyond the childbearing years. Despite their many years together, Abraham and Sarah had not been able to bring a child into the world. Yet, here, the eternal God tells them that they shall have a son. In the twilight of their lives they are to have their first child together ... a child of promise.

How absurd. Yes, I would venture to guess that at a promise such as this, we all would have fallen on our faces and laughed. We can only imagine that, as Abraham and Sarah heard this news, they could think of a thousand reasons why they should not believe.

It is impossible, right? Impossible, that a man of such advanced age and his beloved childless wife should now not only bear a child but birth the nations. Impossible that the bent back and arthritic knees would now bend to lift an infant born upon such promise. Impossible.

If God's promises rely on human ability to perform, yes, this is impossible. If God's promises are dependent upon human achievement, this could never happen. If faith is focused on the capability of human hands, hearts and minds, then this can never be accomplished.

However, if we are speaking of the God who creates all things from nothing; if we are speaking of the God who breathes life into all the living; if we are speaking of the God of life, death and resurrection...then nothing can be deemed impossible.

Listen again to a portion of our New Testament Lesson. Paul writes of Abraham, "For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all (Abraham's) descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations,' according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.'" Paul continues, "(Abraham) did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the

promise of God but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what (God) had promised. Therefore, his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness'" (Romans 4:16-22)

For some reason, this old man and woman, this odd couple, believed. For some reason, in spite of the way things appeared, in the face of nature and human logic that would say "impossible," Abraham was certain. Somehow, he was fully convinced that God was able to do that which God promised.

Why? Because the object of the faith of Abraham was not faith itself. So often, we fall into the trap of just trying to have more faith, trying to believe harder. The line sometimes goes, "If I could only believe as Jean believes, everything would be so much better." But the faith itself is not the point. No, what is important in faith, the faith of Abraham, is the object of this faith. The God in whom Abraham believed was the God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4:17). This is the God who is able to do that which has been promised. This is the God who turns darkness to light, who changes mourning to dancing, who brings resurrection to the dead. This God is why Abraham was fully convinced that the promises were true. It is not the magnitude of Abraham's faith that makes the difference. It is the object of it. Twentieth century theologian, Emil Brunner, writes, "Here stands out clearly not only the nature of faith but also the nature of God. The true understanding of God corresponds to true faith. God is the absolute Lord, the sovereign Creator. That kind of absolute faith can exist only towards this God" (Brunner, p. 38).

Only a faith in this sovereign God, in the God of the promises, in the God of Abraham, can one look beyond what is seen and see the divine. This is why, as Paul writes, "Abraham did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body" (Romans 4:19). Even though Abraham was fully aware of his physical condition, his chronological age and his personal limitations, he trusted in the God who was able. He did not trust in his own abilities to make it happen. Abraham's faith, as one commentator puts it, "triumphs over the difficulties it fully understands" (Briscoe, p.106). "Hoping against hope," Abraham believed (Romans 4:18). It is God who is able, not Abraham and Sarah. Because of this, Abraham was fully convinced.

God is able. What God promises and what God is about to do come solely through the grace of the Almighty. For Abraham and Sarah, the exemplars of faith, the only response in the face of such outlandish grace is gratitude and trust. After all, this is the God who creates something from nothing. This is the God of the cross and the empty tomb. This is the God who is able to do that which has been promised. What other response is there than to be fully convinced?

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Back at poolside, Cam hears her mommy's soft, reassuring voice over her shoulder say one last time, "Cam, honey, don't be afraid. I will be here. I will. I promise."

Something is different this time. Upon hearing her mother's voice, Cam spins and runs toward the side of the pool. With her sparkling blue eyes as wide as silver dollars, she reaches the edge and lets out a squeal of joy as her feet leave the ground. Her spirit soars as she finally flies through the air, fully convinced in the one who is there. And that changes everything. Amen.

Benediction:

Consider the object of your faith. It does not depend on you. God is able ... able to create something out of nothing, to turn darkness to light, sorrow to joy, unbelief to belief and death on a cross to victory and glorious resurrection. God is able.

And now, today, may there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received and pass on the love that has been given to you ...

May you be content knowing you are a child of God ...

And may you be fully convinced that God is able.

Amen.