

I have a very odd relationship with our first lesson this morning, because on the one hand it takes me back to just one of the worst days, on the other, there is an element of that worst day that fills me with hope and love, and not that there is a third hand, but on the third hand it also makes me chuckle because in the midst of all those feelings, it was also a moment where I was like what in the world is happening to the point of kind of being amused by being completely confused.

Ok, so what am I talking about? My grandpa passed away in March of 2016 and as tends to be the case I was tasked with giving a eulogy on behalf of the grandkids. My sisters and I adored my grandpa, he was the warmest, kindest, funniest man from whom I get my love of sports and deep introversion, hence why this was just one of the worst days. It ended up getting decided that I wouldn't be the only one doing a eulogy for the service, but that a long time family friend would also be doing one. I had never met this woman, only knew her by name and the oddity that my family had a long time friend who was a nun—still to this day, no clue how that happened or really how she factored into family dynamics. Anyway. Our pastor calls us both up at the same time and Sister Pat starts doing her eulogy, I am sitting behind her, and this is where the confused amusement comes in because she starts relaying this story, our first lesson. I have heard

a lot of eulogies, but never have I heard one start with a retelling of God, Abraham, and the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, and she is like going into intense detail, we are getting all of the nitty gritty of this story, and I am just like what is happening? What in the world does this have to do with my grandpa, because frankly, my grandpa was not a religious man and so it's not like he had some deep and abiding love for a random story in the middle of Genesis. And y'all Sister Pat just keeps going. I'm sure it was probably like three minutes but it felt like an eternity talking about this story, but then she got to her point, and we arrive at the hope, love, and warm feelings I always get when I hear this story...

The reason that Sister Pat decided to eulogize my grandpa with this particular story from scripture was because she concluded that he would have been the one righteous man left. In a scenario in which the fate of a city is resting on whether or not even one righteous person remains amongst the rest, Sister Pat ardently believed that my grandpa would have been the one to tip the scales in favor of the good. Honestly, he would have told her she was ridiculous because my grandpa never believed he was anything special, anything beloved and so he would have rolled his eyes and been like I don't know about that, but she was right, whether he trusted it or not, knew it or not, righteousness and goodness was kind of my grandpa's thing, and so

whenever I hear this text, I'm reminded of him and how grateful I am for the example he set for everyone around him.

So those are all of my warm fuzzies, but it's all I can think about when I see this text, and yet there is so much here. Let's set some context so we can establish just where God and Abraham are in their relationship. All of the really big stuff has happened between God and Abraham at this point: God has taken Abraham out and asked him to try and count the stars so he can see how many descendants he will have, Abraham has moved to a new country and received a new name, he and Sarah were just told they will have a baby in their old age, so we are at a deep and abiding point between Abraham and God. Abraham has constantly and consistently shown a faithfulness that is rock solid. He listens to God and he trusts God and so now we see the results of what happens when a relationship is built on a solid foundation—pushback.

Abraham stands with God outside of Sodom and Gomorrah where his nephew Lot lives, and it becomes apparent that God is on the brink of destruction. Things have gotten so bad within these cities that there is no turning back, it is at a point of burning it all down and starting over again, and this just doesn't sit well with Abraham and so he starts pushing. What if there are fifty righteous people there? Do they have to suffer for the sake of

the wicked? And God says, ok, deal, if there are fifty righteous people, we'll call the whole thing off, and what continues on feels like an auction. Do I hear 45? Do I hear 40? What about 30? 20? 10? Each time God is like, ok, I hear you, I will hold off if there are as few as ten righteous people in these cities. And of course we know how this works out, not even ten righteous people exist in these cities and so things don't turn out to well, for the population or for Lot's wife. But that's not the point, the point is two fold: one, Abraham's relationship with God is at a point where he feels like they can have this conversation and two, even with the back and forth debate Abraham lets *God* define righteousness.

There can be no doubt that what Abraham does is admirable. He is fighting for his siblings, for the sake of those who have been impacted by the wickedness of others, trying to make the case that those who are innocent should not have to suffer for the sake of evil. He is standing up and using his voice within the space that he has. I mean, let's be real, not many people would be at this level with God, having an audience and an audience that is open for debate. However...once reality sinks in, that there aren't even ten righteous people, Abraham lets it go, Abraham trusts then when it comes to righteousness, that is God's territory and the fate of humanity, the fate of Abraham's siblings lies solely within God's purview.

And this is where we tend to run aground of this text and want to push back and be like...wellllllllll, if we're close enough to God to argue with God then God needs to take our opinions into consideration and boy do we have opinions about who needs to be destroyed and who needs to be rescued and we really really *really* wish that questions of righteousness were up to us. We have all sorts of opinions about who, what, where, and why God needs to swoop in and lay down some fire and brimstone, but all of those things are based upon *our* definitions, and as hard as it is to admit, it's not up to us...because if it was...well, I'm sure there would be plenty of people who would have us on *their* list, so we probably need to be really thankful that when it comes to matters of righteousness, we are less than qualified.

At the end of the day, each of us is always going to have the thing that someone could point to and say *that!* That is why you aren't righteous, and there is always going to be something that we will point right back at them and say, yes, but *YOU* have *that!* Humanity loves nothing more than an echo chamber of finger pointing that allows us to feel justified over and against those other people, because it means that we never have to look internally and ask, but how can I be better, how can I work on my own relationship with God, how can I work on my relationship with others, how can I live out my faith more? It's so much easier, and frankly way more fun

to look at what we think other people can improve on, instead of looking within. We want to imagine that we would be that one righteous person left, and maybe we would be, but that doesn't give us the right to use that as a reason to puff out our chests and say, well then, I am better than you.

I don't know about y'all, but lately...more than lately honestly...the world has just felt heavy and hard and close to impossible. It's way easier to sit back and just look through a lens of judgment, angst, and frankly hatred. We want to point to all those people over there and say they are the reason everything is falling apart, and sure, it feels good in the moment, but ultimately it ends up being soul-crushing, because it means we're losing our ability to see the world through a lens of hope, through a lens of grace, and at the end of the day isn't that what we all actually want, for ourselves and for others? A little bit of grace, a little bit of hope, and a world of love.

It's kind of amazing how freeing it can be when we decide that we're going to let God be God and humans be humans and see how the cards fall. When we free ourselves from the burden of judgment, from the job of balancing the righteousness scales, it actually frees us to be about the actual work of righteousness, which is what we should be focusing on. Abraham didn't spend his time trying to point out what behavior was righteous or who he thought was righteous, he spent his time speaking up for those who didn't

have the ability to speak for themselves—it didn't really go well for them, but the point is that he tried, he used the faith he had, the relationship with God to see what might happen. That is what we are freed for when we decide that God can do God's thing and we'll take care of what we can manage. It frees us to speak up for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, and try to help others see the world with grace.

I know it isn't always the flashiest or most fun way to live, but it is what God calls us to, to live with grace, to live with a lens of love, and to try our best however we can to make the lives of our siblings better. It's true that we cannot save the world on our own, but if we can save the life of one person by showing them love, acceptance, and grace? If we can show them that they are valuable, worthy, and seen, isn't that a better use of our time, isn't that a better use of our faith?

I think about what my grandpa would think if he knew that somewhere in the world are people who still think he would have been the one righteous man, and while I think he would have laughed, I think it also would have moved him in ways he couldn't explain and *that* is what faith is all about, taking the gift we have been given and doing our best to make even one person feel and know that they are beloved. Isn't that a better use of our time, for the sake of one person, to make them feel loved? **AMEN!!!**