

YOUTH SUNDAY WITNESS

by

Cameron Elston

8:30 a.m. February 28, 2010

(Second Sunday of Lent)



ST. PAUL'S

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

5501 Main Street

Houston, Texas 77004-6917

713-528-0527

www.stpaulshouston.org

Lectionary Texts:

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; and Luke 13:31-35

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

²But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

³And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.”

⁴But the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.”

⁵He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.”

Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

⁶And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

⁷Then he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.”

⁸But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”

⁹He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

¹⁰He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹²As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

¹⁷When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

Psalm 27

¹The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

⁶Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

⁷Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.

⁹Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

¹³I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

My name is Cameron, I'm 16 years old, and I'm a junior in high school. I've been playing football for the past three years. In November, we finished a hard season with a record of four wins and five losses.

My team mates and I were looking forward to a quiet off-season in the weight room when our head coach surprised everyone by declaring that all players had to participate in a spring sport. Our choices were Wrestling, Power Lifting, and Track.

As I was pondering my options...

...As a wrestler, you get to learn some cool take-down moves, but you have to wear those spandex body suits and share your personal space with other teenagers.

...In power lifting, you get stronger, but you spend countless hours in the weight room.

Then Coach came up to me and said, “Elston, you are running track.” It appears my options were narrower than I thought.

The month of January, we began training, and I was trying to figure out which track distance I’d be best suited for when Coach came up to me and said, “Elston, you are running hurdles.”

Hurdles?...Hurdles?...Hurdles.

I’m smart enough to understand when my options aren’t optional, so I’m now learning how to run the 300-meter hurdles. Of the 5,000 students at my school, three people run hurdles. And I’m one of them.

Coach has been teaching me good hurdle technique. He keeps saying, “You run hurdles, not jump them.” and “Attack the hurdle.”

In layman’s terms that means “go as fast as you can, take a long step at the last second, and keep going.”

I understand why the other 4997 students haven’t tried out for the hurdle squad. Sprinting full speed at a metal bar that you’ll probably crack your shins on isn’t appealing.

Nevertheless, for that past months I’ve been attacking those hurdles.

As I’ve been training, we’ve had a lot of activities at our house, and I realize we have other hurdlers in our family.

My Grandfather was diagnosed with cancer in June. In July, he had surgery to remove the cancer and moved in with our immediate family. Every day he would wake himself up, grab the car keys, drive himself to the radiation center and receive several hours worth of radiation treatment. The treatment temporarily took away his sense of taste, making eating a chore not a pleasure. When we asked Grandpa what

different foods tasted like, he would say, “It tastes like cardboard. Everything tastes like cardboard.” Throughout.

Coach says to attack the hurdles....Grandpa’s been doing that.

Shell announced a 20 percent layoff. Both of my parents had to apply for different jobs, while continuing to deliver the ones they had, while keeping the household running, supporting Grandpa. My mother is now traveling every week to New Orleans where her new job is. When she comes back, my father has to leave for Shreveport to work on his new job. The strength my mother and father have has kept our family together. My family has grown closer despite being apart. Seeing each other is no longer a daily thing it has become a special event.

Coach says run as fast as you can....Mom and Dad have been doing that

The Matron of the family, my Great Grandma James, celebrated her 101st birthday in August. Seeing Grandma every Sunday for dinner has been a big part of my family’s life. Every Sunday night, the family gathers for a nice home-cooked meal where Grandma would tell us stories of the dust bowl, living through two world wars, life on her farm in South Dakota, and many more stories. She passed away quietly in early January.

Coach says if you trip, keep going...Great Grandma James’s stories repeated that message over and over

In Genesis 15:1, God said to Abram “Do not be afraid... I am your shield.” Abram’s faith and trust in God allowed him to receive an “exceedingly great reward.” Abram trusted God and did what he was asked of in return for the first covenant. Then God said to Abram “To your descendants I have given this land.”

Coach says never lose faith...Abram didn’t.

I'm fortunate to have these examples near me because I've got some hurdles on MY track.....SATs, college selection and acceptance, and leaving home.

The thought of living on my own scares me. I'm fortunate to have such a loving community and family like St. Paul's to help guide me as I leave to go into the world on my own. Although I may be going out into the world by myself, I've learned from my parents, family, and the St. Paul's community that God will always be there to "lead me on a level path" and that God is with us as we attack the hurdles in our lives.

As David so beautifully wrote, "The Lord is [our] light and [our] salvation. Whom shall [we] fear? The Lord is [our] stronghold of [our] life. Of whom shall [we] be afraid?" David reminds us that regardless of how hard life becomes, do not be afraid because God is with us every step of the way.