

Pastor's Sermon

March 16, 2025 Lent 2

The book of Genesis is a book about beginnings. That's what the word genesis means. That's how the book begins "In the beginning, when God created...." The overriding theme of the book is that God wants our world to prosper, to be fruitful without fear. God creates an orderly world in order to accomplish that goal. God crowns that creation with humans to care for it.

Why would God bother to create all this? Many theologians speculate that God did it out of love. God wanted, God needed (think about that) something to fulfill God's need to love. God created humanity in God's own image to see that all of creation would also in share that love.

True love requires freedom; the freedom to let our beloved ones be who they are. This is not always an easy thing to do. It is not always understandable. It is not always how we want them to be. But true love requires freedom and that means the possibility that our beloved ones may do things hurt us. God out of great love allows us humans the same freedom to love, the freedom to choose.

As Genesis tells us, we humans do not always make good choices. Our choices can wound and hurt and harm. We have the desire to control others and that results in disorder, destruction, murder, and mayhem as the opening chapters of Genesis shows. With every human failure comes judgment. Sometimes that judgment has severe consequences. But with every judgment, God provides redemption. God offers us second, third, fourth, and more opportunities to begin again. That love continues throughout all of Scripture. Every page shows God at work bringing hope and new life. God is at work to call us to a different way of living that promotes a fruitful existence without fear.

In God's love affair with creation, God commissions people to share that promise, that love. Abram and Sarai are two such people. Abram was a successful merchant, blessed by God to be a blessing. God knows they are not perfect, as Genesis often points out. But out of love, God takes the risk.

God makes them a promise that they will be the beginning of a great nation by which the entire world will be blessed. There is one major problem. You can't be made into a great nation if you have no descendants. You can't have descendants without having children. So far, Abram and Sarai are childless. Abram is already 75 years old. Sarai is 65. Both of them are well beyond normal child bearing years. All that this childless couple has is a promise, a promise of multitude descendants that looks to be impossible. But they trust that promise. They pack up everything they own (they were wealthy) and move to new place far away, because God tells them to do so.

In our First Reading, God approaches them for the second time. They had some doubts about this promise of children. You can't fault them if they had their moments doubt about all of this. God appears to Abram in a dream and repeats the promise of descendants as plenteous as the stars in the night sky. They decide that God, not the circumstances of life, make the promise trustworthy. They believe that the same God that made the stars can also make a son for an old, childless couple. One author wrote, "Abram did not decide to believe because he felt new life in his loins, nor because Sarah came and told him that she was experiencing morning sickness. They simply believed they could rely on the promise of the Promise Maker."

The problem with any promise is that there is always a delay. Waiting is hard. You can't blame them for their moments of doubting and their need for reassurance. They had lived with so many broken promises in life that they had come to expect the same from God. Their moments of doubt continued, "How long, O Lord, how long?" God continually reassures them. Finally, when Abram is 100 and Sarai is 90, a son is born to them. They named him Isaac, which in Hebrew means "laughter," because they had many times when they had laughed at the very thought of God's promise coming true.

I love the story of Abram and Sarai, because they are honest about what doesn't make sense to them. They hope against hope. In spite of what appears to be impossible, God keeps the promise. Abram and Sarai came to know through their wanderings, wonderings, doubts, and despair that God is faithful and God keeps promises. Even when God cannot be explained, understood, or defended, God can be trusted. God is faithful, even when we

fail to see how those promises of God can be made real in our lives. Even when we can't imagine how we can get through it, God can be trusted, because God is faithful. The text makes us ask two big questions: "Can Abram trust God?" and "Can God be trusted?" The answer is "Yes!" God puts flesh on the promise and gave them a son. They had to wait for long time- for the promise to be fulfilled, but it was twenty five years later.

We run our lives by clocks, calendars, schedules, and timetables, so we often assume that God does too. We want God to tell us when – what time, what day, what year those blessings will come, forgetting that God is not limited by our plans, our schedules, or our hopes. Of course we argue, "But God, if you don't do it by Tuesday...!" "God, next year will be too late!" We try to put human limitations upon God, and we doubt, "Where are you God when I need you?" or even "Is there really a God at all?"

We don't like waiting. We don't like waiting on the phone. We don't like waiting on a long line. We don't like waiting in traffic. We don't even like waiting our turn. We want fast food, fast service, fast cars. We are impatient when we have to wait. So when we deal with the promises of God, we are equally impatient and our doubts grow. We begin to conclude if the answer is not given right now, it never will be. We cry, "O Lord, how long?" How long until I am well again? How long until my marriage gets better? How long until you find me a job? How long will I be will I be consumed by grief? How long before those promised blessings come? That is when our faith is tested, just as it was for Abram and Sarai. But a promise is a gift, a grace from God.

Faith trusts God's promises, sometimes despite all of the evidence to the contrary. Faith simply waits for God to fulfill those promises. Faith means we know that God will do keep those promises. Faith acts in the sure knowledge that in the end, God will triumph. God's love continues today, tomorrow, and many days after that, have no fear. Our Psalm today begins "The Lord is my light and salvation, whom then shall I fear? That Psalm ends with the words, "Wait for the Lord, be strong". Amen.