

Waiting and Waiting for Good News

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

March 17, 2019

Scripture: Deuteronomy 26:1-11

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Let me first put this story of the encounter between Abram and the LORD in a bit larger context: about 3 chapters back, the LORD chose the most unlikely people to be father and mother of a great nation. God picks Abram and Sarai, sends them on a special journey. They are told to go from their comfortable home, their destination a strange land, but God says, “[Of you] I will make a great nation...” They are childless, by the way.

The old couple go as they are told, and they wait for the child promised to them... nothing.

Time passes. Abram and Sarai go to Egypt, they come back. No child.

They become wealthy...except that they still have no child.

Today's passage opens with the words, “After these things...” That is code for – *a great deal of time passed, and then...*¹

Then, what to some of us seems unbelievable, Abram picks up his quarrel with the LORD in today's encounter. After all the waiting, the LORD has good news; restating the previous promise of progeny for the old couple. “Yeah right!” Abram says, “You didn't give me children. I have money now. I guess this servant of mine is your idea of my descendant!” Who is to blame him for his impatience? In all that time, he had continued to trust his God. God even said it out loud in Abram's hearing.

Waiting, and waiting, for not just good news, but God delivering on that promise. Still not delivered. With God's covenant comes some information that I'm guessing Abram didn't want to hear; news that yes, Abram and Sarai will ultimately be mother and father of a great nation, except that descendants will be enslaved for generations before they will enjoy prosperity.

If you are were worshipping for the first time, there in the seat, hearing this story of a blessing deferred, and deferred – well, that might be difficult to see as “Good News.” But it sure is a true-to-life story, isn't it?

How many friends of mine have dealt with health problems? They wait for the specialist appointment. They undergo a battery of tests. They don't feel well, but they can't do much, except wait. Then they have the appointment, and they are relieved. But the waiting has taken its toll. *Sometimes* they don't get good news. And they wonder, legitimately, *is this fair?* They might *lodge their complaint* in prayer to God. People ask me: *Is that sacrilegious – to dare to question, or complain to, God?* Well, our passage today suggests maybe you are justified, to get angry at God. To question God. Old Abram, still childless, quarrelled with God. And God, in this story, as in other Bible stories; God makes a very generous covenant with Abram. It is not a normal covenant

¹ Rolf Jacobson. *Working Preacher* commentary Gen 15: 1-12, 17-18, Mar 17, 2019.
<https://www.workingpreacher.org>

where two parties each make promises. Here, Abram doesn't have to make any promises. God is the one who self-imposes God-self with obligations.

But even with that promise, Abram's descendants will not enjoy prosperity right away. *More waiting* for that great nation to emerge.

I'm going to confess that I'm fed up with evil systems in this world today! I have watched, perhaps you have as well, massacres around this world in recent times. Mostly in the United States. *I have had enough* of certain leaders spouting racist comments. In this increasingly polarized world. People not coping emotionally or economically find scapegoats for their anger – immigrants, Muslims, Jews, Palestinians, people of the LGBTQ2+ community, women and so many more vulnerable groups in this world. Add to this volatile mix of disenfranchised people *the availability* in some countries, *high powered weapons*.

We who yearn for peace and justice in our world *are tired of waiting*, and waiting, for glimmers of Good News!

I cannot imagine the experience of loved ones of the 50 men, women and children shot dead in the two New Zealand mosques last week. And the many more who were injured and critically injured. What can we do but lament – cry out from our hearts to God, pleading for change. Now in our modern world, many will tell me, "Dave, what's the sense in all that drama? Where is it going to get you?"

One thing I have learned from my time spent in the Middle East, in Israel and Palestine and Egypt...places where these Biblical stories like that of Abram emerged, *I have learned that people can be tenacious and faithful*.

I think that at the heart of this Jewish and Christian faith of ours *is an invitation to tenacity of faith*, and tenacity of resolve to not accept injustice passively. That approach to life runs counter to the way I was taught. Growing up in church, I learned to be well behaved. Worship is rather orderly, not much room for expression of anger.

But I wonder if these times demand of us as people of faith, *more passion, more healthy opportunity* for honest, healthy expression of our feelings... *These are violent, unjust times*. And people who frankly I don't think are worthy of leadership, are being elected into places of great power around the world.

What can we do?

One thing we can do is pray. Speak to your Creator as if that Creator cares deeply about your pain, your anger, your yearning for something different. *Perhaps we also make space for honesty in worship too*. Space to name our pain as well as our hopes and visions. If ever there is a season in our church year for honesty, *surely it is Lent*. Jesus, our Lord, our guide, our teacher of truth telling sets his eyes on Jerusalem in today's passage. If the Pharisees were telling him to get away or Herod will surely hunt him down.

Surely the disciples are by this point feeling the ominous pull on Jesus to Jerusalem, to something ominous. Those disciples, like us, were not good at waiting. Inclined to pull Jesus back, even as he taught followers to take the path less travelled; a path that often leads to a cross.

Faithfully waiting, even the heart wrenching waiting we must do ourselves or with others who are grieving... Following Jesus, trusting, even knowing that the path is going to be fraught with uncertainty and pain... If we take our Bible and faith tradition seriously, we know deep in our bones that we are not alone as we wait. Nor are we to do it passively.

If we pray...if we lament, complain to God from the depth of our soul...AND take time also to listen for the still small holy voice in our darkest, most challenging moments, *the story of Abram's encounter with the LORD suggests our God might have Good News for us*. On this journey of Lent, we know that a cross stands ahead. There are always crosses we face. But, my friends, remember, ultimately - God's answer: *an empty tomb...the cry of joy of women that a saviour is alive...the fear of death, for us vanquished*.

God has got this.