



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick

Mid-week Lenten Worship March 4, 2020

Sermon Title: "Hearts Renewed"

Gospel Text: Genesis 12:1-4a

Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran as God directed. can you imagine it? I wonder how Abram's heart felt when God told him he would be blessed? I wonder if it skipped a beat? Or if he tried to tell himself not to get too excited? Or if he was just stunned. Abram has seemingly been faithful and yet despite having an extended family, and lots of possessions, he and Sarai do not have the one thing that would designate them as blessed if their day- they have no children. They probably long ago had closed off that part of their hearts, no longer to hope in that way again. It would have been easy to turn away from God.

But what about God's heart? After all, God put heart and soul and breath into creation, but human beings try to play God. I doubt this comes as a surprise. They twist words and take what isn't theirs. They decide that life is unfair and they need to take things into their own hands. They turn on each other with a craving for blaming and shaming. It can be exhausting and heartbreaking. I am not talking about the current state of our country or world affairs, that's just the first couple chapters of Genesis. For Adam and Eve, God responds with a curse, and redirection. A story we often tell from the standpoint of the humans, and not God's heart. Before too long, it seems that mischief has gone universal and humans are cursed. God saves one family. After Noah and his kin, the story continues on, and before too long, despite everyone being able to understand each other and have unity, humans decide to use that unity to build a really high tower, all the way to heaven just to create the ultimate testament to themselves, not God. The Tower of Babel is a pretty big "in your eye, God" thing. God does not strike them down, but the curse is the scattering of people across the land who can no longer understand each other, the story goes. That's the back story of the first 11 chapters of Genesis before we get to today with God and Abram. If you have ever been let down in any relationship, in your business, your family or somewhere else, if you have felt cheated or on the receiving end of an untruth, or just out and out hurt by someone you have tried to love, God understands.

If we were in charge, it would be easy to turn away from humans.

But now God pivots, again, and makes promises to Abram that seem nothing short of stupendous to him-blessing upon blessing. After all of these spoken as

Abram stands at Haran, a place whose name means “crossroads.” Abram hears God speak, “You will have a land, you will father a nation, you will be remembered as great, you will be a blessing to others, and people will bless each other by your name.” Stupendous promises for Abram. Come to think of it, these promises are nothing short of stupendous for God, given what we know.

**All Abram has to do is to leave behind what he has known for what is promised. This story is not about who Abram has been by his own hand, but who he will become by the hand of God if he goes as God beckons-
“Leave your land, leave your people, leave your house for what I have yet to show you. And trust that I, God, will be your God. For you, but for generations.”**

For God’s part, God leaves behind what God knows too. God does not walk away from the people. God instead walks closer toward blessing, leaving behind curses for promised blessings. God will reveal the ability to choose life over death and blessing over curse, while choosing to remain intimately connected. Even though “God may grieve and even rant over the incessant evil the humankind dreams up in every generation, but given the nature of God’s commitment, God will not...give up the creatures that share the divine breath.” (Frederick Neidner)

God chooses not to abandon hope, but to continue not only to renew us and our hearts, but to renew God’s own heart. And God will continue to renewing and blessing even when it costs pinning God’s heartfelt hopes on a cross.

God’s deepest heartfelt words to us, from the dawn of time, to this moment with Abram, to each of us, come in those words “I will make of you...”

These words of blessing bring us into being, and affect the entire world.

I will make of you great things. I will bless you, you will be a blessing.

GO.

Sounds an awful lot like, “GO and makes disciples of all nations.”

While promising “I will dwell in you and be with you.”

God calls us from the places where our hearts feel vexed, tired or broken, God calls us from what we have known, and the patterns we perpetuate and the world teetering on our foundations. God calls us into renewal and resurrection- the ultimate making of us.

God’s ever renewing heart does this knowing that Abram, later Abraham won’t always get it right, in fact sometimes he gets it horribly wrong. Abram was neither perfectly faithful before or after this call from God. Neither were those first disciples, whose journey we follow now, nor are we.

Yet, as God's heart of grace for us renews again and again, we are continually called into renewal of our hearts, into blessings yet to be revealed, and into God's future.

There can certainly be much that makes us want to walk away, close off hope or lose heart, but God wants us to join hearts in a walk in this world as stupendous as Abram's or of the disciples after the resurrection.

And, dear church, it is our time. To live as those called to reflect that blessing and renewal of hearts to all nations.

Not because we have somehow mastered being without fault, but because we reflect the one who has-whose heart never ceases to give up on this world, and this humanity.

And if our hearts are to reflect the heart of our God who loves us this deeply, it will indeed call us beyond our limits and beyond ourselves but the blessedness can be stupendous.

As we now stand at that crossroads in this age, perhaps the words of John Bell's hymn "The Summons" can linger and beckon our hearts:

"Will you come and follow me

If I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know

And never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,

Will you let my name be known,

Will you let my life be grown

In you and you in me?"