

## Sermon – Abraham. Genesis 15:1-6

The first 11 chapters of Genesis deal with humanity as a whole. The first two chapters are about creation. Adam and Eve and the serpent are the main characters in chapter 3. Their desire to be like God...to judge good and evil for themselves sets the tone for the next 8 chapters.

As the generations are born and the population grows, so does evil. The wickedness of people is drowned in the flood. But things don't get better after that.

The section on Abraham starts in Chapter 12.

God desperately wants to draw people back into the life God wants them to have and into the relationship God wants to have with them.

God's plan is to establish a covenant relationship with one family so that they can show the rest of the world the beauty of life with God.

God chooses Abram and Sarai, or as they are later called, Abraham and Sarah. We're not given a reason why they are the chosen ones. There's nothing to indicate they were morally or in any other way superior to anyone else. In fact some of the things Abram and Sarai did after God's call suggest they weren't at all.

God speaks to Abram at the beginning of the story...

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

So Abram and Sarai packed up their belongings and their livestock and off they went. Their nephew, Lot went with them.

Along the way they wind up in Egypt. There, Abram worries he'll be killed so Pharaoh can have Sarai. Apparently even at an advanced age she was very beautiful. So Abram tells Sarai to pretend she's his sister and sends her to be basically a sex toy for Pharaoh. God had to wonder then if Abram was the right choice.

But then Abram's not so sure about God either. The one thing the whole promise requires has not yet happened. Abram and Sarai have still had no children.

So let's pause the story there for a minute. Abram and Sarai have been waiting for years for the promise to be kept. Barren in the first place, Sarai is now well beyond child-bearing age. They left their home and their families for the sake of this promise.

Materially, they remain well off. But they won't live forever. What of this promise then?

You could hardly blame them for giving up on it.

Any couple who has experienced infertility understands the month after month of disappointment. We don't use the word barren for infertility anymore because that always applied only to women. But the word barren captures the pain of disappointment and unrealized dreams, no matter what those dreams are.

We've all had our barren times, if not the literal barrenness of infertility. We've had times of barrenness when a hoped for job or promotion didn't materialize. Or we get sick or hurt or depression or other mental illness strikes and derails everything we've worked for. A child makes self-destructive choices. Drought destroys crops.

Or times like now...a pandemic hits. In the first few weeks of the pandemic, it seemed like energy, hope, and creativity flowed. We looked at the future a little uncertainly, but we talked about how the world might actually be better when we came out of the pandemic and what we would do differently.

Speaking at least for myself, I thought that future would come a little quicker.

Now, it's almost 7 months later and there's no evidence the pandemic will be gone soon. Fatigue has set in as people have had to do work and school and church in a way that feels foreign.

Everything is harder and even social activities have to be thought through and approached differently. For some high risk people, isolation has come with its own barrenness.

People are tired of taking the protective measures that scientists say will help us keep ourselves and others safer. The whole thing has become unfathomably politicized, along with almost everything else, and that too is exhausting. Any economic recovery is stuttering and uneven and many still struggle to get by.

Life can feel pretty barren right now.

So we can join Abram in his plea – what will you give us Lord?

In a sense that is Abram's prayer. What are you going to do about this God?

Well, God doesn't really come up with anything new for Abram...the promise remains the same, and God does give Abram a visual under the starlit sky. Nothing in the situation changes. God doesn't strike Sarai pregnant. There's no baby toddling into view.

All God does is speak the promise again.

And Abram believed God. Abram trusted God's faithfulness, not because of anything special about Abram, but simply because God spoke it.

God's promise sparked Abram's faith, despite all evidence that pointed to the failure of that promise.

God's promise produces faith, just because of who God is.

So what's God's promise to us?

As Christians, the land and descendants promised to Abram isn't so much it anymore. But we do get grafted into the promise of blessing...and the promise that we will be a blessing to others.

We are promised life...abundant life...eternal life. That promise was sealed anew for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God promises us life, even when what we see is barrenness...when what we see looks more like death. Our present reality has a way of getting in the way of trusting any future hope.

And yet...God continues to make the promise.

That's what did it for Abram. Nothing in his situation changed, but God's promise somehow made Abram believe.

The longed for child is still a long ways off. Before Isaac, Abraham and Sarah's son, is born, they will doubt again.

They will doubt to the point they have Sarah's slave Hagar get pregnant by Abraham so that the promised son will be manipulated into existence. They learn it doesn't work that way.

God just repeats the promise.

Eventually it does happen. Sarah gives birth to Isaac. Isaac then has twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Both of them have many children. But Jacob is the bearer of the promise. His 12 sons become the 12 tribes of Israel. Abraham and Sarah's family did indeed become too numerous to count.

So no matter how barren things feel right now, God keeps the promise alive. That promise is the one spoken by Jesus who said I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Abundant life isn't just about time. It's about life now...it's a promise that says life is not barren even now.

Our hope for our present struggle does not come from our own designs, although I trust that God will show us the way.

Our hope for our present time does not come from our government leaders and the outcome of the election, however important that might be.

Our hope for our present time comes from the one who promises us life, not barrenness...now, in the near future, and into eternity.