

**SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT 2-28-21**

**GENESIS 17:1-7, 15-16; PSALM 22:22-30; ROMANS 4:13-25;**

**MARK 8:31-38**

**GOOD MORNING -**

**THE CENTRAL THEME FOR TODAY IS GODS' PROMISES AND A QUESTION WHAT IS OUR COMMITMENT TO THE WILL OF GOD IN OUR LIFE.**

**OUR OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT READINGS ARE INTERTWINED IN THAT PAULS' LETTER TO THE ROMANS DWELLS ON THE SAME SUBJECT OF ABRAHAM. SINCE THEY ARE SO INTERTWINED I AM GOING TO JUST STAY IN GENESIS IN THIS PASSAGE THERE IS A DEFINITE CHALLENGE TO ABRAM TO MOVE TO A NEW LEVEL OF TRUST AND FAITH. AT A TIME WHEN ABRAM MAY HAVE THOUGHT HIS BEST YEARS ARE BEHIND HIM, GOD ASKS HIM TO MOVE UP. THIS CALL TO MOVE HIGHER REACHED ABRAM AT A POINT OF WEAKNESS AND INABILITY. IT IS AMAZING TO CONSIDER THAT WHEN WE THINK IT IS ALL OVER; GOD MAY BE THINKING ABOUT BEGINNINGS.**

ABRAM IS NOW NINETY-NINE YEARS OLD. IT HAS BEEN TWENTY FOUR YEARS SINCE HE RECEIVED GODS' PROMISE AND LEFT THE LAND OF UR. IT HAS BEEN THIRTEEN YEARS SINCE THE EVENTS RECORDED IN THE LAST CHAPTER (GENESIS 16). SO FAR AS WE CAN TELL GOD HAS NOT SPOKEN SINCE HE CAME UPON HAGAR ON HER WAY TO EGYPT. THIRTEEN YEARS OF SILENCE, WHEN ABRAM HAD TAKEN A WRONG TURN. THAT SEEMED TO HAVE CAUSED THIS SILENCE FROM HEAVEN. WE HAVE REASON TO SUSPECT THAT THESE WERE YEARS OF UNHAPPINESS AND UNREST IN THE HOUSEHOLD. THE PRESENCE OF ISHMAEL IN THE HOME CREATED CONTEMPT AND BITTERNESS, ENVY AND STRIFE. GOD USED THESE 13 YEARS TO TEACH ABRAM THE COST OF ACTING ON HIS OWN AND THE CONSEQUENCE OF SERVING GOD IN THE FLESH AND ACTING PRESUMPTUOUSLY. FOR 13 YEARS HE HAD LIVED WITH THE FRUITS OF HIS IMPATIENCE.

NOW GOD APPEARS TO ABRAM AND SAID "I AM ALMIGHTY GOD; WALK BEFORE ME AND BE BLAMELESS. IN THE KING JAMES VERSION THE TRANSLATION OF THE WORD

**BLAMELESS IS PERFECT. THE ROOT MEANING OF THIS WORD IS WHOLEHEARTED. GOD THEN MAKES SEVEN PROMISES – HE WILL MAKE AN AGREEMENT WITH HIM; HE WILL MULTIPLY HIM AND MAKE HIM EXCEEDINGLY FRUITFUL; HE WILL MAKE OF HIM MANY NATIONS; THIS COVENANT WILL BE WITH HIS DECENDENTS; HE WILL GIVE ABRAM AND HIS DECENDENTS THE LAND OF CANAAN AND HE WILL BE THEIR GOD.**

**NOW WE HAVE AN INTERESTING TWIST TO THIS STORY – THE GIVING OF NEW NAMES TO ABRAM AND SARAI –**

**FOR 24 YEARS ABRAM HAS BEEN LIVING UNDER THE SHEPHERDING HAND OF GOD. ABRAM WAS NOT THE SAME MAN IN CHARACTER THAT HE WAS WHEN GOD FIRST CALLED HIM. THROUGH OUT THE BIBLE, WHEN CHARACTER CHANGES SIGNIFICANTLY, GOD CHANGES THE NAME. NOW GOD CHALLENGED ABRAM TO A CLOSER WALK WITH HIM BY CHANGING HIS AND HIS WIFES' NAMES. THE NAME ABRAM MEANS “HIGH FATHER OR FATHER OF MANY.” HE HAD NO CHILDREN UNTIL HE SIRE ONE WITH THE SERVANT GIRL.**

ACCORDING TO A BOOK TITLED "GENESIS: A DEVOTIONAL EXPOSITION" BY DONALD GRAY BARNHOUSE – "IN HEBREW GOD ADDED ONE LETTER TO ABRAM'S AND SARAI'S NAME, THE LETTER FORMED BY BREATHING. IN HEBREW, THE NAME JEHOVAH IS FORMED BY THE FIVE VOWELS, I, E, O, U, A, WITH THE TWICE REPEATED H. THE WORD FOR SPIRIT WHICH MEANS BREATH, IN HEBREW, IS PRONOUNCED BY EXPELLING AIR. "

THE NAME SARAI MEANS "CONTENTIOUS". THIS SPEAKS VOLUMES ABOUT THE HOME LIFE OF ABRAM AND SARAI. SOLOMON WROTE "IT IS BETTER TO LIVE IN A CORNER OF THE HOUSETOP THAN IN A HOUSE SHARED WITH A CONTENTIOUS WOMEN" (PROVERBS 21: v9) HAVING A THOUSAND WIVES, SOLOMON NO DOUBT KNEW WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT. SARAI WAS A PROBLEM WIFE. YET IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, PETER SAYS THAT THIS WOMAN IS A MODEL FOR ALL WOMEN TO FOLLOW, BUT ONLY AFTER HER NAME IS CHANGED TO SARAH, WHICH MEANS "PRINCESS." SHE IS NEVER REFERRED TO AS SARAI IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. GOD DOES NOT SET HER FORTH AS A PATTERN

FOR WOMEN UNTIL SHE BECOMES SARAH AND LOSES HER CONTENTIOUS SPIRIT. AS SARAH SHE LEARNED TO DEVELOP “A GENTLE AND QUIET SPIRIT, WHICH IN GOD’S SIGHT IS VERY PRECIOUS. (1 PETER 3:4)

SO HERE WE ARE TODAY WITH GODS PROMISES, STILL IN FULL FORCE, AS DESCENDENTS OF ABRAHAM.

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN OUR DISCUSSION OF THE GOSPEL READING IN MARK THAT REFERS TO TAKING UP OUR CROSS. I DO WONDER HOW “TAKING UP ONE’S CROSS” MIGHT BE RELEVANT TO US TODAY.

WE LIVE IN A POST CHRISTIAN CULTURE. CHOOSING TO LEAD A CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NOT EASY. IT RUNS CONTRARY TO OUR VALUES. JESUS RECOGNIZED THIS WHEN HE SAID” ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE, FOR WIDE IS THE GATE AND BROAD IS THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION AND MANY ENTER THROUGH IT. BUT SMALL IS THE GATE AND NARROW THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO LIFE, AND ONLY A FEW FIND IT.” MOST, IF NOT ALL, OF US HERE TODAY ARE CHRISTIANS AND SO, IN SOME WAY OR ANOTHER

**WE HAVE CHOSEN TO FOLLOW THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE.**

**SO I WOULD LIKE TO ASK THE QUESTION:**

**HAVING TO FOLLOW CHRIST, WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF OUR COMMITMENT?**

**TO FOLLOW THAT CHALLENGE A LITTLE FURTHER, I WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST THAT WE HAVE 3 CHOICES IN OUR LEVEL OF COMMITMENT --- SO FAR AS THE WILL OF GOD IN OUR LIVES IS CONCERNED.**

**FIRST, WE CAN DECIDE TO PUT HIS WILL FOREMOST IN OUR LIVES SOME OF THE TIME, SECOND, MOST OF THE TIME AND THIRD, WE CAN DECIDE TO PUT HIS WILL FOREMOST IN OUR LIVES ALL OF THE TIME.**

**I BELIEVE THAT PETER MADE EACH OF THESE CHOICES AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF HIS CHRISTIAN LIFE.**

**LET'S TALK ABOUT THE FIRST CHOICE OF SOME OF THE TIME:**

**IN TODAY'S GOSPEL READING WE SEE PETER REBUKING CHRIST WHEN JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES THAT HE (JESUS) MUST SUFFER AND DIE. AT THIS POINT IN HIS LIFE, PETER WANTED A CONFORTABLE CHRISTIANITY TO FOLLOW. HE**

LOVED JESUS AND WANTED ONLY THE NICE THINGS ASSOCIATED WITH CHRISTIANITY – FOR EXAMPLE, HE LIKED THE MIRACLES JESUS PERFORMED. JESUS’ BEAUTIFUL TEACHINGS (SUCH AS THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND THE SERMON IN THE PLAIN) AND BEING AROUND JESUS AS HIS FOLLOWER. THESE ALL FIT PETER’S THEOLOGY – BUT THE CROSS DIDN’T.

TODAY WE CAN BE LIKE PETER AT THIS TIME OF HIS LIFE. WE CAN HAVE TWO SPHERES OF LIFE. A CHRISTIAN LIFE AND A SECULAR LIFE. HOW OFTEN DO WE FEAR BEING THOUGHT OF AS TOO FANATICAL BY OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS? ARE THERE TIMES WHEN WE ARE ASHAMED OF BEING CHRISTIANS? I KNOW THAT SOME OF MY FRIENDS, WHO NOW KNOW THAT I AM PREACHING IN MY CHURCH, SEEM TO HAVE A DIFFERENT IDEA OF WHO I AM REALLY – I HAVE SUDDENLY TURNED INTO A “GOODY-TWO-SHOES” (NOT TRUE! – I JUST HAVE STUDY MORE).

YET JESUS SAID IN MARK, “IF ANYONE IS ASHAMED OF ME AND MY WORDS IN THIS ADULTEROUS AND SINFUL GENERATION, THE SON OF MAN WILL BE ASHAMED OF HIM

WHEN HE COMES TO HIS FATHER'S GLORY WITH THE HOLY ANGELS."

THE SECOND CHOICE WE CAN PUT GOD'S WILL FOREMOST IN OUR LIVES MOST OF THE TIME: MATTHEW RELATES THAT PETER HAS JUST DENIED KNOWING CHRIST THREE TIMES. PETER WANTS TO FOLLOW JESUS TOTALLY, BUT WHEN IT CAME TO THE CRUNCH, HE BAILED OUT. I AM SURE WE'D HAVE BAILED OUT TOO. THE SPIRIT IS WILLING BUT THE FLESH IS WEAK. THERE ARE AREAS IN ALL OUR LIVES, WHICH WE CANNOT COMPLETELY GIVE OVER. AND IT IS A SIGN OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE THAT WE FIND THE HOLY SPIRIT COMING BACK TO THESE AREAS TIME AND TIME AGAIN UNTIL WE SURRENDER THEM. WE FIND OURSELVES WANTING, LIKE PETER TO BE TOTALLY COMMITTED, YET HOLDING BACK.

OUR THIRD CHOICE TO PUT HIS WILL FOREMOST IN OUR LIVES ALL OF THE TIME IS A DAILY COMMITMENT.

BEFORE THE CRUCIFIXION, WE READ OF PETER DENYING CHRIST – AFTER THE RESURRECTION AND FOLLOWING THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ACTS 2, WE SEE A TOTALLY



DIFFERENT PETER. HE WAS BOLD TO PREACH THE RISEN LORD, EVEN BEFORE THE HIGH PRIESTS. WHEN THEY THREATENED TO BEAT HIM AND MADE VEILED THREATS, HE REPLIED “JUDGE FOR YOURSELVES WHETHER IT IS RIGHT IN GOD’S SIGHT TO OBEY YOU RATHER THAN GOD. FOR WE CANNOT HELP SPEAKING ABOUT WHAT WE HAVE HEARD.” HERE WE HAVE A DIFFERENT PETER, PERHAPS HAVING REFLECTED JESUS OWN WORDS IN THE GARDEN: FROM LUKE “FATHER, IF YOU ARE WILLING, TAKE THIS CUP FROM ME; YET NOT MY WILL BUT YOURS BE DONE”.

WHEN WE MAKE A WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT TO GOD’S WILL IN OUR LIVES – THEN PRAYER AND READING OUR BIBLE WILL BECOME CENTRAL TO OUR DAILY LIVES. WE WILL SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES TO KNOW MORE OF THE WILL OF GOD. WHICHEVER CHOICE WE MAKE, WHICHEVER LEVEL OF COMMITMENT WE HAVE – WILL AFFECT THE TYPE OF CHRISTIAN WE BECOME. AMEN