

“A Two Way Street”, Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-26; Mark 8: 31-38; Psalm 22: 23-31 3-12-06

There is an old Girl Scout round that sings “Whene’re you make a promise, consider well its importance, and when made, engrave it upon your heart.”

Promises, oaths, vows, all have the same basic ingredients. They are covenants that need to be fulfilled. Some are unconditional covenants and others are conditional. The covenant God formed with Noah and all human kind, that there would never be another flood that would destroy the whole earth, was an unconditional promise, Noah did not have to do anything to ensure that the covenant would be binding.

On the other hand, the covenant formed with Abraham was one that was conditional. God promised to make of him a great nation but Abraham had to follow the pathways God set before him.

The change from the way life used to be for Abram and Sarai is subtly signaled by the change in their names. Abram became Abraham and Sarai became Sarah to reflect that all had been transformed when God took them under the Creator’s wing. A new covenant was established, one which is the basis of three major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. According to this story in our Bible, Abraham is the father of us all. We are partners in this ancient covenant to honor our Creator as our God.

Having the covenant made with Abraham in the back of our minds helps us grasp what Paul was saying to his readers in his very theologically meaty letter to the Romans-- the most complex piece of his work.

In our passage for this morning he recalled the importance of the covenant relationship God developed with Abraham. He pointed out to those who would and could hear that this very special two way street had existed through time until their day and age and would exist in time far beyond them. It was not a covenant made and enforced through a law. It had been grasped and carried forth through faith. In the King James version of a few of these verses it says: “Who (meaning Abraham) against hope believed to hope, that he might become the father of many nations.....He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith giving glory to God.”

Sometimes we stagger and slip in our belief and set aside the covenant so carefully forged with Abraham forgetting that it binds us also to be faithful to God.

Abraham saw great transformation in his life because of his promise from God and his promise to God. And that is how this how faith story is supposed to work. When we make a promise to God, to discern, to the best of our ability, the way we are to walk through this life we enter into the same kind of covenant that Abraham did. If we make this promise with our eyes wide open our lives should change because of it.

Jesus reiterates this in our reading from Mark when he tells us that “whoever saves his or her life shall lose it; but whoever loses his or her life for his sake and the gospel’s shall save it. For what shall it profit a person if he or she gains the whole world and loses his or her soul.”

What does it profit us if we gain fame or fortune, and lose the values set before us through the message of Christ for good and decent living? What do we gain if we set aside love, forgiveness, understanding, patience, hope for better tomorrows? What is it we gain if we stop accepting one another as imperfect creatures, creatures in process and demand that everyone fit our same pattern of life to be all right in our own eyes? Does it matter how others appear in our eyes and how they score on our systems of judgment? I think not. It matters how we score on God’s system, how it is we have paved and repaired the two way street we have responsibility for, the only one we have responsibility for, our own relationship with God through Christ. That’s what matters.

Jesus tells us we maintain this relationship by setting aside the past ways we have struggled to live to accept the new. It is not so much who we are at this moment or who we may have been in the past that matters. What matters the most in God’s eyes is who we will be tomorrow.

As I was forming this sermon in my mind's eye this past week, I received a little inspirational piece via the Internet.

Surprisingly it was entitled :
 "WHO WILL YOU BE TOMORROW?"

This is what it says:

A man sat at a stoplight. The woman in front of him was going through papers on the seat of her car, and when the light changed to green she didn't go. A green light is not a suggestion, you know, it is more of a commandment. But she didn't notice.

When the light turned red again, she still had not moved. The man in the car behind her now started screaming a few choice word and beating on his steering wheel. A policeman tapped on his windshield. "You can't arrest me for hollering in my car," the man said. The cop asked for his license and registration, returned to his car, talked on the radio for a while, and finally handed the papers back. The driver protested, "I knew you couldn't cite me for yelling in my own car!"

The officer replied, "I didn't want to cite you for shouting in your car. But I was directly behind you at the light. I saw you screaming and beating your steering wheel, and I said to myself, 'That man is out of control. He's going to hurt someone!' Then I noticed the cross hanging from your rear view mirror, the bright yellow 'Love Is a Choice' license tag, the 'Give Peace a Chance' and 'Prayer Changes Things' bumper stickers, and I was sure you must have stolen the car."

His behavior did not reflect his bumper stickers. But let's not be too critical. Are we always the people we want to be?

We make changes by stretching. Personal transformation can happen when the person we presently are does not yet resemble the person we hope to be. Better to set high ideals and occasionally fall short than to settle for mediocrity and succeed.

The important question is not, "Who are you today?" It is better to ask, "Who will you be tomorrow?"

Remember: if nothing ever changed, there'd be no butterflies. "(Life Support System Publishing, Inc.)

This is the message that has come to us across the ages. It was the message given to Abraham when the first two-way street was established and it is the message that lives for us in our day and age. Life and our relationship with God through our Christ is a process, we must find our way and stretch into the new beings we are asked to become. This is what God hopes for us beyond all hope. This is what we need to begin to hope for and work toward for ourselves. Amen