

Sermon 2009 Lent 2

3/8/09

Text: Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16

Theme: "The First is the Best"

What we see in our reading from the Old Testament is the Abrahamic Covenant from God. God reached into Abraham's life for no particular reason and decided to make him the father of many nations. It was all God and none of it was Abraham. In fact Abraham didn't even believe that God would deliver. And can you really blame him? The promise was first made when Abraham was 75 and Sarah was 65.

When our text comes along Ishmael was already a teenager because Abraham and Sarah had long ago given up on God. So Abraham had gone off and slept with Sarah's maid when he was 85 so that he could get an heir because obviously God was not going to uphold his side of the covenant. We always run into problems when we start helping God out. He really does know what he is doing.

So in our text God comes to Abraham and reminds him of the covenant even though Abraham is 99 now and Sarah is 89, Abraham will have a son and he will be the father of many nations. This is something God will do without any cooperation from Abraham. The part that is left out of the reading this morning is God's call for circumcision to mark the son of Abraham as the recipient of the covenant. And all of the sons of Abraham afterward were marked in this way. This is important because when Christ came, he changed the mark from circumcision to Baptism.

Baptism is the mark that you and I have that marks us as recipients of God's covenant. In Baptism God reached through the waters and claimed us as one of his own children. It is not based on what we do or did. It is simply God's will for us to be his children.

Most of the time we are quick to remember the covenant made at Sinai, the 10 Commandments, but that covenant is far less important to us than the one made with Abraham. In the Sinai Covenant the prize is a good life and we are incapable of keeping our end of the bargain. Every one of us has broken several commandments in the last few hours. Don't deny it. Remember thought word and deed counts. Motive is the basis for the 10 Commandments. I don't care how sweet your words are, if in your heart there is spite and hatred and venom then you have trampled God's covenant with you. I don't care if you put your last dollar in the collection plate. If you did it with the wrong motivation, you have trampled all over God's covenant with you. No, the Sinai Covenant is not where we want to be.

If you have the choice of a covenant where you have to do something or a covenant where you have to do nothing, which are you going to pick? I'm going to pick the one where the maker of the covenant does all the work. That's why we pray in the prayer of the day, "O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul."

The covenant has been made and the covenant is kept and we are the recipients of this. But, what does that mean for us in real time?

It means that we don't have to be angry all the time. God is in charge and we have been claimed. We have won – what do you have to be angry about?

It means we can stop worrying. God is in charge. It seems like every family has a "vacation from hell" story. The car breaks down. The tent leaks. The wallet is lost. But years later everyone is laughing about it. Likewise we all have little blips in our lives, job loss, cancer, death of loved ones, emotional pain. That's right, I said little blips, because that is what they are in the long run, after we come into our inheritance.

It means that we can start enjoying life more and complaining less. God has given us an exciting ride in this life and we learn as we go and perhaps the most important thing we learn is how ultimately, nothing matters but the covenant.

AMEN