

JOURNEY THROUGH GENESIS



50 DAYS OF

# *Eastertide*

A DAILY DEVOTIONAL

*by the pastors of First Presbyterian Church of Nashville*

WEEK 3

SUNDAY, APRIL 26

## READ

Genesis 15

## REFLECT

In this chapter, we often tend to focus on that beautiful passage where God takes Abram outside of his tent and has him look up at the stars. This is such a poetic scene wherein God tells Abram he has not forgotten him and that his promises still hold fast – Abram will become a great nation with offspring as countless as the stars. But when we begin to read on, we find a scene not as easily adapted for Hallmark. It's frankly, a bit grotesque. God has Abram take several animals, cut them in half, and lay their carcasses out side by side. Then, God (in the form of a smoking firepot and flaming torch) passes between these pieces. Bizarre right? Well this is actually a practice that was quite common when a covenant was made in the Ancient Near East. Traditionally, when a tribe or nation conquered another people, as an act of loyalty, the king would have the conquered people walk between the pieces of slaughtered animals. This was a way for the people to say, "We will be obedient to you, and if we are not, may it be done to us as we have done to these animals."

But here, it is God, the king, who is making that oath. He is demonstrating to Abram (in a way his culture can understand) that he intends to keep his part of the covenant. This is a remarkable reversal, and one that reminds us of how faithful our God is.

## RESPOND

Where in your life do you feel caught between the promise and the fulfillment of that promise? What are you yearning for right now? Bring those longings to God today and allow yourself to hear God's words, "Fear not, \_\_\_\_\_, I am your shield."

## PRAY

*Lord, when it's difficult to trust you, remind me of your faithfulness. Continue to draw me in, even in my doubt and fear, that I might remember your true character is goodness and your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.*

MONDAY, APRIL 27

## READ

Genesis 16

## REFLECT

Sarai is tired of waiting. We can relate to that feeling during this Covid 19 crisis. Sarai is ready for God to show up and make good on the covenant promise, but she's still barren. They still don't have any children. So what does she do? She tries to author God's story. She and Abram take control of God's blessing and get a child by other means. Obviously, this doesn't go well. What's incredible is that their impatience and lack of fidelity, doesn't negate God's choice for them. God's grace abounds. The same is true for us, when we can't handle the long journey of hope that our faith sometimes requires, God still wants to bless us. The victim in this story is Hagar. She's been forced into a relationship with Abram, suffered abuse from Sarai, and has run away. Here's where the story gets interesting. Pregnant, alone, and afraid the angel of the Lord finds Hagar. God hears her cries, comforts her, and blesses her. Hagar even names God. This is the first time in the bible that God is named. The first time God shares the Divine name is with Moses at the burning bush, but Hagar is the first human in scripture to name God. The name she gives describes what God has done for her El-roi, "God sees". Not only does God see Hagar, God's angel blesses her and the child in her womb. Grace abounds. Genesis 16 reminds us that God is the one in control, God's sees us in our loneliness and fear, and God's grace abounds.

## RESPOND

How are you doing with waiting right now? Hope and patience go hand and hand. What's your patience level at these days? What are the things you do on a daily basis to fool yourself into thinking that you're in control? Do you believe that God hears you? What would happen if all the time you spent trying to be in control you spent speaking with God? Where are the anxious and lonely places in your life right now? Could it be, that God will meet you there, just like God met Hagar?

## PRAY

*Gracious God, you hear us, you see us, and even when we try to take control, you bless us. Grant us patience to practice the waiting of hope. Wake us up so we can see and recognize you even in the lonely and fearful places of our lives. We pray all these things in the mighty name of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.*

TUESDAY, APRIL 28

## READ

Genesis 17

## REFLECT

If God's gracious choice of Abram (Genesis 12:1-3) weren't clear already, the grace of it is reinforced by the promise of Isaac.

Abram loves Ishmael, his son by the slave Hagar: "O, that Ishmael might live in your sight!" But the LORD replies, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him . . ."

Inclusion in God's covenant always has been a matter of God's own gracious choosing, not a matter of human godliness or of birthright. Paul, in Romans 4, observes that even Abraham wasn't Jewish when God chose him. By definition, then, he was "ungodly" when he was chosen. And "God proves his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)

Remember the scandal of the Gospel, which is the scandal of the tax collector who went home justified: "I came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

If you are a child of God, it's not because you were godly, or even because you were born into a Christian family. The same will be true of anyone who becomes part of the covenant from now on. It will be because God called, ungodly though we are, and his grace converts us all.

## RESPOND

Imagine some of the people and groups who seem to you ungodly, who in fact may be ungodly. Imagine yourself as one of them.

## PRAY

*Lord Jesus, if I cannot see myself as ungodly outside you, I have not yet grasped your mercy to me. Show me anew the depth of your mercy in this: you were willing to be condemned in my stead. Open my heart to those people whom I see as ungodly, especially to those people who are ungodly. For them you died. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29

## READ

Genesis 18

## REFLECT

God and Abraham shared a special relationship. God had chosen Abraham to be the father of a “multitude of nations.”

God entered into a covenant with Abraham that Abraham and his children and household after him might keep the way of the Lord. God honored Abraham by sharing with him His intent to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of the sinfulness of its inhabitants.

Abraham enters into a dialogue with God, asking God to spare the cities if a certain number of righteous people are found in the cities. Beginning with 50 righteous people, Abraham continues to bargain with God and God ultimately agrees to spare the cities if 10 righteous people are found.

The dialogue between Abraham and God shows us that God is willing to hear our concerns. We are encouraged to follow in the tradition of the Psalmists and lift our honest concerns, heartfelt petitions, our pleas for mercy, even our protests to God and be assured that God hears us. Our God is a God of both justice and compassion.

## RESPOND

Have you ever “wrestled” with God in prayer? What concerns or pleas for mercy, compassion, justice and assistance do you long to bring before God today? Lift up your heart to God in prayer and make your requests known to God.

## PRAY

*Gracious God, Thank you that you hear and welcome our prayers. Help us to honestly set before You the deepest cares and concerns of our hearts and to pray with thanksgiving and with assurance that our prayers are heard by You. Grant to us Your peace that passes all understanding. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

THURSDAY, APRIL 30

## READ

Genesis 19

## REFLECT

This is one of the darkest chapters in all of the Bible. We all know the basic plotline of Lot's escape from Sodom and Gomorrah as it goes up in smoke and ash. But we likely don't remember (or want to remember!) the particulars of the story, just how shadowy a tale this is. I don't remember hearing a sermon preached on Genesis 19, and it is the kind of text that will find a parent scrambling to edit on the fly with his/her young children.

Let's back up a minute. In Genesis 12, God makes a spectacular promise to Abraham, that he will be the father of a great nation and that through his family all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Well, the family of Abraham doesn't make it easy for God to keep His promises. And Genesis 19 is case in point. Maybe the best news we can hope for coming out of Genesis 19 is that there is a Genesis 20—that God, despite to utter depravity of humanity, continues to work out His promises of blessing an unworthy world.

In the same way that I am supremely thankful for the Cross of Christ, I am glad for the “Genesis 19—like” chapters in the Bible. They are a reminder that no matter how deep our sin, God who is full of grace and truth, refuses to be done with us.

## RESPOND

If you haven't yet, really read the story. How does it make you feel? Where do you see yourself in the story? What does this story say about the character of God?

## PRAY

*Holy God, you despise what is evil and love what is good. We are sinful, justly worthy of punishment. In one way or another, we are citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. And yet your Son bears your pure and perfect wrath on the Cross, so that we might be saved to live with you, as your beloved. All glory and honor and praise be to Jesus! Amen.*

FRIDAY, MAY 1

## READ

Genesis 20

## REFLECT

Abraham is good at rationalizing his sin. In verses 12 and 13, Abraham explains away his actions. He says of Sarah, “well she actually is my sister, we have the same father, but different mothers. Oh, and I told her she should expect this sort of thing before we left on this journey. A journey that God sent me out on.” In his response, he may actually believe that he has done no wrong in offering his wife to a foreign king to secure his safe passage. It sounds so obvious when we say it aloud. I wonder, how many sins need just be said aloud, that we may realize just how obvious they are. Walter Brueggemann notes that Abraham though Abimelech is the upright one in the narrative, he is still dependent upon Israel. Brueggemann says, “The preeminence of Abraham here rests not on Abraham’s virtue, but on God’s promise.” Brueggemann is not making light of the sin, but notes what Abraham’s life is dependent upon; the amazing grace of God.

## RESPOND

Is there a sin in your life that you have been rationalizing? What would it look like to say the sin aloud, perhaps even to someone else? Be sure, there is even grace for sin that we have rationalized.

## PRAY

*God of grace, how sweet it is to be forgiven by you. May we not be afraid of confessing who we are. May we trust in your grace, and trust that your grace will abound all the more in our confessions. In the name of the one who has given everything, that we may be redeemed, Jesus, our savior. Amen.*

## DAY 21

SATURDAY, MAY 2

### READ

Genesis 21

### REFLECT

Laughter fills the air. The child of promise has been born. God has been faithful, and out of barrenness life has come. Isaac (laughter) comes as pure gift to Abraham and Sarah in their “old age.” This is no natural birth. The text holds together the word of God and the birth of the child. God’s eternal purpose comes in a concrete reality. God is not limited by barrenness, old age, or human plans, but free to act in pure grace. The juxtaposition of Ishmael (the child of human striving) and Isaac (the child of promise) raises the question of what will God do with Abraham’s oldest son? Sarah, driven by fear to protect Isaac, wants Hagar and Ishmael to be discarded. Yet, God provides a spring and is with Ishmael as well. God is faithful. God fulfills his promise to Abraham and Sarah. Through Isaac God’s people will come. In God’s grace, the other son is not to be dismissed. God provides.

### RESPOND

In Galatians 4, Paul calls us children of the promise like Isaac. Our lives are filled with promise. Free from our sins, eternal and abundant life, I am with you always, and participation with God’s rule of love are just a few of the promises. Especially during this time let us be children of promise living into God’s future.

### PRAY

*Gracious Lord, remind us of Your promises and help us to live as children of promise through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*