

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Old Dog, New Tricks”

June 8, 2008

Rev. Art P. Ritter

Benjamin Maynard as Abraham

Genesis 12:1-9

12 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. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I 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.’

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, ⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. ⁹And Abram journeyed on by stages towards the Negeb.

Theme: The promise of a new beginning can be a frightening thing. It can come when we are content in our old existence. It can arrive when we are mourning what we have lost. New beginnings may seem impossible, improbable, beyond our level of energy to bring into being. Yet God reminds us that all things are possible when one lives in faithful covenant with God. God's promise for our lives never ends. There will always be new beginnings.

Scripture: Genesis 17: 1-8, 15-19

Opening Words: Sometimes it is hard to trust in a promise. Have you ever been promised something that you never received? I’m still waiting for an autographed baseball from the 2006 Detroit Tigers that my banker in Salt Lake City was supposed to get for me. Through our experience of broken promises, we’ve learned to question the character of some people or at least doubt their ability to fulfill a promise.

Sometimes a promise can be a frightening thing. Promise means potential which requires change. We don't want to change. We like ourselves as we are. The promise of something is often beyond the level of energy we have to bring it into being.

Our God is a God of promise, a promise that is sure and certain even when our belief is suspect and shaky. In the twists and turns of life, we may think the promise has left us, but God never leaves. We may want to run away from the promise, but we can never hide from what God intends. We might think God has forgotten, that God can't be trusted, but God's promise never ends. We may wish to take the promise into our own hands and control it but we learn that the promise is never fully realized until God makes it happen.

The story of Abraham and Sarah is one of God's promise. It is a story of how God is faithful, how humanity is fickle, and how action based on trust in God's promise leads to fulfillment.

Today I want to tell you that story!

(The skit begins with the Narrator at lectern or pulpit. Abraham later enters.)

NARRATOR: When Abraham was seventy-five years old, the Lord God said to him.....

Abraham enters from rear

ABRAHAM: Hold it right there sonny! Wait just a minute! Did I hear you say I was seventy-five years old? I thought I was at least eighty! My back is killing me. I can't hear a thing out of my right ear. My eyesight is failing. My knees are so sore. This arthritis in my elbow is out of control. Even my stomach doesn't work as well. Why I used to be able to polish off a whole pepperoni pizza at one sitting. Now when I eat pepperoni my stomach feels like it ...(continues to talk while Narrator interrupts).

NARRATOR: Abraham? Abraham? Abraham?

ABRAHAM: Yeah? What is it?

NARRATOR: Are you about finished? I don't think the congregation really needs to hear more about your- digestive problems.

ABRAHAM: Okay. I suppose you're right sonny. Go ahead. You can keep reading about me.

NARRATOR: Thank you. As I was saying, Abraham was seventy-five years old when the Lord God said to him, "Leave your native land, your relatives, and your father in law's home and go to a country that I am going to show you."

ABRAHAM: What's that you say? Leave my home and start all over again? Are you wacky? I have to tell you though, that part about leaving my crazy in-laws sounds awfully nice. You should listen to my brother-in-law sing in the shower. He scares the goats away. And his wife's cooking. That would scare more than just the goats.

NARRATOR: You'll be done with them soon. God has called you to leave your home behind.

ABRAHAM: Now that part is a little scary. Look at me! Don't you think I am a little too old to be starting a new life in a strange land? I paid off the mortgage on my tent years ago. I've gotten too set in my ways. Besides, despite my in-laws, I kind of like it here. It's, it's- so comfortable.

NARRATOR: But Abraham, there's more. God said, "I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing."

ABRAHAM: Pardon me. I must have heard you with my right ear. Did you say blessing?

NARRATOR: That's right, blessing.

ABRAHAM: Well, la-dee-da! Now God is going to give me a blessing? Now, when I'm eighty years old. Now when the best part of my life is over? What good will a blessing do me now? I'm way too old to enjoy anything resembling a blessing. I don't even have any children to inherit a blessing. (Pauses) Is this God's idea of a joke? Blessings at eighty years of age?

NARRATOR: Abraham?

ABRAHAM: Yeah, what do you want?

NARRATOR: I told you before. You are only seventy-five years old.

ABRAHAM: Seventy-five. Eighty. What's the difference? (mumbles) Disrespectful kid!

NARRATOR: I heard that! Abraham, it says right here in the Bible that you are only seventy-five years old.

ABRAHAM: Seventy-five, schementy-five. You're only as young as you feel. Today, I feel as if I am eighty years old. My knees. My right ear. My arthritis. That pepperoni pizza.

NARRATOR: Abraham?

ABRAHAM: What? What?

NARRATOR: Can I continue reading the story?

ABRAHAM: I guess so. After all, you're the one holding the book!

NARRATOR: Very well. Later in life, when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God made this promise to him, "You will have a son."

ABRAHAM: Now stop right there! Now I can't hear out of my good ear. What did you say? A son? A baby? Are you kidding me? At my age? How am I going to explain that to my wife Sarah? She never has thought too much of my talking to God. She doesn't like it when I come home with a vision. She'll think I've been sipping too much wine before my afternoon nap. She'll think I've eaten one too many pepperoni pizzas. She'll never take me seriously. She'll laugh at me! She'll.....

NARRATOR: Abraham?

ABRAHAM: Now what? Grandchildren?

NARRATOR: Well, not yet. But there is more to God's promise for you. Do you want to hear it?

ABRAHAM: (sarcastically) Oh, I can hardly wait. What comes next? A college scholarship when I'm one hundred and ten? A sports car for one hundred and twenty? A National Football League contract when I've one hundred and twenty-five?

NARRATOR: Abraham, God is serious. There is more to the promise.

ABRAHAM: All right. Read on- I think.

NARRATOR: And God said to Abraham, "I will give you many descendants and some of them will be kings. You will have so many descendants that they will become nations."

ABRAHAM: I knew it. It is grandchildren. I'm not babysitting them for the weekend. They're not leaving them with me (continues to mumble).

NARRATOR: Abraham. Not just grandchildren but descendants. Lots of generations. And some will be kings.

ABRAHAM: Kings? My family? God has evidently never met my brother-in-law. He couldn't be king of my goats.

NARRATOR: And God said, "I will keep my promise to you and to your descendants in future generations as an everlasting covenant. I will be your God and the God of your descendants."

ABRAHAM: Now wait just a minute there Mr. Smarty Pants Narrator. Just think about what you are saying! A promise? A new land? A blessing? A son? Descendants? An everlasting covenant? How is that going to happen? How can I do it? I mean, change and promise are all right when you are young and have lots of dreams and tons of energy. But just look at me. Change and promise can't possibly come to me!

NARRATOR: It says right here that it will and it does.

ABRAHAM: Are you sure? (Pauses) Oh brother. How am I going to explain this to Sarah? How am I going to live through it?

NARRATOR: It says right here that you will do it by faith in God. You will trust that God's presence will be with you in every single change and promise. You will do it by knowing that God has something in mind for you in each new day. You will do it by seeing God's hand in your future and by trusting that God will be holding your hand as you live each new day. Abraham, you will live today as if God's promise were coming true to you tomorrow. That is faith.

ABRAHAM: Faith, huh? It sounds so complicated.

NARRATOR: And one day you'll be known as a great man of faith!

ABRAHAM: Faith? Trusting in God. I suppose I can give it a try. I guess I never thought faith was that important.

NARRATOR: But faith is what your story is all about.

ABRAHAM: Faith! Wow. What a concept! I guess I believe that God is always with me. I guess I believe that with God all things are possible. Maybe, just maybe God can do all of those crazy things you read about. Maybe I can do those things. Better yet, maybe I can talk to my wife about those crazy things.

NARRATOR: Abraham. We all believe you can do it!

ABRAHAM: Yeah. Faith. If God has anything to do with it, it will work out all right. A new land. A son. Descendants. A blessing. An everlasting covenant. You know sonny, this is starting to sound really exciting!

NARRATOR: Abraham?

ABRAHAM: Oh no, you're going to tell me that this is all a joke. I'm being punked, right?

NARRATOR: No Abraham. I wanted to tell you that this is the end of the story.

ABRAHAM: The end?

NARRATOR: That's all I have to read today anyway.

ABRAHAM: Huh! That's not the end of the story Mr. Smarty Pants Narrator. There's a lot I've got to do. We've got to get that U-Haul packed for the trip. Sarah doesn't travel lightly you know. She's got all of those Persian rugs. Then there are those mushy goodbyes. My brother-in-law will probably create quite a scene. I just hope he doesn't sing! I better check AAA for the best route to my new homeland.

(begins to walk to back)

And you know, in another twenty-five years or so, I am going to be a father. I better stop on the way home and pick up some diapers. It's best to plan ahead you know. Got to get moving! God has plans for me!