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How Many Times Lord

How many times do we need to hear something, for the idea to shift from being laughable to be accepted? I suggested to some that we were waiting until the first weekend in July to reopen for worship and they laughed that millions have been marching together, they have been going to restaurants, so why wait? Another group also laughed and said, "You can open the doors, but we probably will not be in worship until next January."

According to Genesis, our Creator created Creation out of nothingness, to be fruitful, multiply, love God, one another. But humanity saw attraction in what was forbidden, sinned and were cut from the Garden. Creation as a whole became so corrupt, God started anew with only Noah. God directed Noah and his descendants be fruitful and multiply, loving God and Creation, carving into the heavens the arc of the Rainbow as covenant. When Abram was 70 years of age, God called Abram to be faithful and follow to the Mountain and Green Valley God would show, and God would gift Abram a Name, a Land and Generations. After 19 years of following, God creates a new Covenant with Abram. The word "covenant" literally means "to cut" and Abram is told to take a sharp rock to surgically remove his foreskin and that of every male in his household. Being set apart in this intimate and permanent way, God changes his identity from Abram to Abraham; that of his wife Sarai to Sarah meaning Princess; and distinguishes for them what is kosher for them to eat and what is now unclean.

Leaving home and family, customs and traditions, trusting God for almost 20 years, changing your identity, being altered in the most intimate way revealed as clean at procreation, and in the daily foods we eat, seems to demonstrate Abram's faith in God. As illustration comes this "comedic" demonstration of hosting. In the Bedoin culture of nomads, putting yourself out to be hospitable to others, is considered a sacred, holy opportunity to share God's blessings. I said comedic... Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr described that "Laughter is the Beginning of Prayer" when we consider how far we are from our ideals, we laugh.

Ancient Judaism accepted as one of the common characters for humor was dignified, respected, pious, older men, the more respected, the older, the more male, the more

humorous. Now I know men have a far lower pain threshold than women, but I recall being with our sons when they were circumcised, and I recall other procedures where as a man your best friend became an icebag. Imagine, Father Abraham ancestor of Islam, Judaism and Christianity as a 99 year old man, sitting beneath his tent, out on the plain below the mountain in the heat of the day, resting and recuperating from the surgery of circumcision. When Abraham sees 3 strangers approach. Instead of our expectation that Abram would call for someone to greet the visitors, or groan and roll over (Now called Abraham) the recently Circumcised Abraham leaps up and runs to bow down to greet them. Abraham entertains the three strangers to rest and have a cold drink of water. Where upon he runs to have the fatted calf prepared and his wife make bread. Just as at the Passover, there is no time to wait for Leaven to rise, so it is unleavened bread. And separate, while they wait, he prepares Milk and cheese for dairy.

Offering a word of hope, one of the three, noting Abraham's condition describes that a year from now Abraham and Sarah will have a child. In response to the stranger, Abraham deflects the comment about his post-surgical condition, and he laughs that Sarah who is 80 could have a child. In that culture and time, a girl was married by age 15, with expectation of pregnancy and child bearing, but month after month the miracle did not come. Over 65 years of monthly cycles she resolves herself as being unable to be fruitful. Finally it is beyond the time when women could conceive children, and NOW God would gift her with this? As much as we each love and adore other people's children, when you are 80 to imagine conceiving, delivering, nursing and raising a child, seems laughable, so Sarah laughs at herself. In response, the stranger asks why she laughed?

Are we good so far?

Because while slap stick, the point of the story is Abraham's Commitment to the Covenant to God. One of our first weeks together we named that the Bible has a stock meaning for numbers:

40 = Quarantine, two full cycles of the moon for purity.

12 as in months of the year, Disciples, Tribes of

Israel and Sons of Jacob = Completeness.

7 = days of Creation.

1 = God.

So what is 3? That's right the Trinity, Father/Son and Holy Ghost, Creator/Savior and Sustenance of Life. Shadrack, Meshack and Abednigo, and also the 3 Gifts of the Magi. 3 = Holy, God's Spirit in the world.

Taking no chances, after 19 years following God, after this Covenant with God is cut into his flesh, when he sees 3 Strangers, he greets them as God in his midst. A Chuppa, is an outdoor tent for shade, open on all four-sides. A Chuppa is the place for Jewish Weddings because it is open on all sides to greet and welcome strangers from the 4 corners of the earth. A Chuppa is a temporary meeting place, or resting place before God. I believe you

can figure out the reason for a Fatted Calf and Unleavened Bread. But then, there is the lingering unanswered question: Is anything too impossible for God?

One of my favorite romance adventure stories, is The Princess Bride: a story of true love. In the story, there is the princess whose name is Buttercup, and the band of misfit heroes includes a dread pirate, the world's greatest swordsman, the strongest man in the world played by Andre the Giant, and there is the smartest man in the world. Whenever there is something laughably impossible, the smartest man in the world reasons "INCONCEIVABLE!" Then in fairytale fashion, the impossible becomes possible. In the story of Sarah, her becoming pregnant for the 1<sup>st</sup> time at 80 has been literally and figuratively "INCONCEIVABLE" but the Covenant with God is to Love God, to Love One Another, to Be Fruitful and Multiply.

Continuing this, the "three Others" representing the Trinity of God, have a conversation among themselves, whether they should let Abraham know the will of God to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah as an inhospitable people? Abraham as an ethical and moral man asks a question of the three, "Must all the Righteous suffer along with the good?" If in the whole City of Sodom there are 50 people right with God, can the city be forgiven? If there were 5 less than that, 45 good persons out of a city? What about 40, or 35? What about 30 Righteous persons? How about 20? What about 10? If out of the whole of the City of Manhattan, or Minneapolis, or Los Angeles, or Chicago, or Washington DC, if in any of these cities there were 10 people who were right with God, could there be forgiveness? And God says, for the sake of 10, I will not destroy.

This is the same question is it not, as before? Can we be fruitful and multiply, can we love God and love one another? Can we entertain angels by welcoming strangers into our hospitality? I believe that is the current question that has arisen in all the protests. Is all the world fearful, isolated and wanting defense, or are there even a few in each city, here in this place, who are willing to see the world through the perspective of another, to look at all Creation through the eyes of the Creator?

We have corrected everything we can imagine. Cleaning and painting the Fountain. Steam cleaning all the carpets, Pews and Chairs. We are replacing the Sound System before the 1st week in July, so you can hear.

However, in order to live in this Green Valley we have to admit to being over 60. As desperately as we all want to quit worrying, return to normal and get on with life, and what could be more a reflection that life is normal than our regular worship of God:

How many of your friends, family and neighbors have a compromised immune system?

They survived Cancer.

They had an Organ Transplant.

They have a Pacemaker or Defibrillator.

They have artificial joints.

They have Parkinson's disease or Diabetes.

The list goes on.

SO, to demonstrate your Love of God, your love of One Another, to Be Fruitful and Multiply, would you wash your hands?

If you have a temperature would you be responsible to stay home, or be willing to be sent home? Would you wear a mask to keep from passing germs to them?

To worship God in our Sanctuary, would you be willing to sit only where it is safe? If we would do so to protect ourselves, or to protect those whom we love, are we righteous enough to be hospitable to others, or is this Green Valley a Sodom and Gomorrah?

The underlying question of the Gospels becomes

“If there were 1 person, 1 out of the whole world who could keep covenant with God, who was righteous, could there be forgiveness of our sins?” If we believe there were not 1 person; Do we believe God loves the world so much, as to become that One for us?