

There are certain birthdays which are benchmarks fulfilling expectations, when at 6 you can go to school, when you are 16 and can get a driver's license, when you turn 18 receiving a draft card. I recall at age 35, realization that I had married my College Sweetheart, we had each earned Graduate Degrees, we had paid off those loans, had purchased two cars, given birth to two children, had great jobs and signed a mortgage for our first home. When I turned 50, the local theater claimed we qualified for Senior Citizen's discount, and at the time I was so insulted I insisted on paying full-price!

In Green Valley, I recognize that celebrating 65, I am still in the Youth Group, but there is a sense of coming of age, becoming legitimate. There is no ignoring the occasion, as I have been receiving solicitations from Health Insurance companies for months, and 30 days ago received the Red/White & Blue Medicare Card. This seems a prime opportunity to advertise that later this month we are having a Vacation Bible School for Adults on the theme: "You Are Never Too Old..."

A week ago, I was talking with a relative who described that after serving as CEO of a Federal Mortgage Company, he lost his job. Meeting with a Headhunter they asked whether he was still looking to BUILD GROWTH or to BUILD LEGACY? It occurs to me that while ours is a congregation and community of over 60, we are primed for GROWTH, for HOPE and New OPPORTUNITIES.

As a Cradle Presbyterian, when we went to Sunday School, the leaders spoke of BC and AD referencing Before Christ and Anno Domine a Latin Phrase meaning IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD which no one knew if that was the year of Jesus' Birth, his Baptism or his Resurrection. In recent years in our lives, we have come to identify that there was a world BEFORE COVID, after which many companies and practices no longer exist and others have begun, so this time, this CURRENT ERA is "Our Year of the LORD." We cannot go back, and we pray COVID will not return, so our CALLING is to Faith and Promise in this TIME & PLACE. We have to respond to GOD'S CALL with GROWTH and PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE!

When last we read about Abram, he was 75 when Called to Leave Home and Family and Everything they had known; TO FOLLOW WHERE GOD WOULD LEAD, a Calling with Promise of a Great Name, a Great Land, becoming the Father of Great Nation. THAT IMPOSSIBLE PROMISE is the identity of Abram.

How many among us at 75, make plans for 25 years in the future?

Yet we resume 25 years later, in addition to now being 100 years old; with THE COVENANT of Circumcision, Abram has become KOSHER, received a new Name as Abraham; AND miraculously, twelve years ago when Sarah was nearly 80 and Abraham 90, they conceived and gave birth to a baby. At the time, the couple were so overcome, they named this child, this fulfillment of promise from God, LAUGHTER, in Hebrew that is the meaning of the name is Isaac.

On the one hand, the most impossible of hopes and wishes of this Calling, have been fulfilled...

At the same time, this is a horrible tale as Abraham had tried to control his life:

- repeatedly protecting himself, by offering up Sarah as a wife to powerful Kings;
- Abraham & Sarah forced her Egyptian slave Hagar to be their surrogate, bearing his child;
- neighboring cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed;
- Sarah had been so jealous of her slave's son Ishmael, she had forced Abraham to banish Abraham's mistress and her child.

For those who imagine the Bible as naïve, pure & innocent, or as coming from a foreign people in a forgotten time, there is something very relevant for each of us to identify with in the story of Abraham.

This chapter of the story of Abraham raises several new and different questions.

At this benchmark, the Promise to Abraham of 25 years ago comes into question...

Will we still believe once miracles have happened, when we have fulfillment of Promise?

Once Israel was free from slavery, led to the Promised Land of Milk & Honey? Will they believe?  
Once David sat on the throne of Israel and Solomon built the Temple?

Once the exiled Nation was deported to Babylon, and when set free to return? Will they believe?  
Once we recognize Jesus died on the cross for us and was raised to eternal life, what do we hope for?  
What do we believe in and hope for GOD to do?

Do we continue to trust and enjoy the company of our partner, when we have been together?

Do we still think of sons and daughters as our “boys and girls”, when they are now older and more successful than we were, when they were born?

Different from the CALL of Abram or the COVENANT, this morning we are talking about SACRIFICE...

In a world where we are told we can have it all, Sacrifice is not popular. Sacrifice is made to sound like losing or giving up what we have, when in truth SACRIFICE is recognition of what is more important, what we truly LOVE and believe in. But hear and know that SACRIFICE is costly and painful, giving up what you had desired. Does ABRAHAM LOVE GOD, more than his SON or his love for who Abraham has become?

In this story, we have to acknowledge that there were early human cultures who practiced the SACRIFICE of their first-born, and this is the Belief of Israel, saying: OUR ANGEL SAID NO. We need to recognize Abraham’s agony, that “this SACRIFICE is of fulfillment of GOD’s Promise” of his Call. Abraham already banished the spare son Ishmael, and they are now even older than they were 12 years ago!

This story connects with many different ideas: The SACRIFICE of ABRAHAM, in Judaism is The BINDING of ISAAC, which as a Parent offering a 12 year old represents BAR MITZVAH; in the Koran of Islam, this story is told of Abram taking Ishmael to Moriah when an angel of GOD saves.

There are many different Mountains throughout Palestine, however, Mt. Moriah where God led Abraham, IS THE PLACE GOD PROMISED to show him, the place where Isaac and Ishmael were each taken to be sacrificed, is the very mountain where David made the Capital City of Jerusalem, where Solomon built the Temple, the same mountain where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, was sacrificed and resurrected; the place where Muslims claim Mohammed was transported to Heaven to receive the KORAN and return to earth; the place where the Crusades were fought.

Even making an offering of SACRIFICE to GOD is heavily laden in the book of Genesis, Cain and Abel had each set out to make a Sacrifice to GOD, while no explanation has ever been given why God accepted the one Cain brought flowers and vegetables, where Abel brought the first Sacrificial Lamb... Looking ahead to the Gospels, what is Jesus but an Offering of GOD’s own 1<sup>st</sup>-born Son, Sacrificial Ram!

Do we just move on to the next crisis, or how shall we recognize when a PROMISE HAS BEEN FULFILLED; How do we recognize when a GIFT IS SACRIFICED, Like THE PROMISE OF LAUGHTER?

Garrison Keelor in his NPR program The Prairie Home Companion had a creative interpretation of this story, that Abraham and Isaac and servants went to Mount Moriah for the sacrifice, leaving Sarah at home. Sarah had regularly been “the behind-the-scenes Actor” in the story of Abraham’s relationship with GOD.

Sarah was the one offered to neighboring Kings to protect Abraham from being killed for her.

Sarah was the one to suggest getting a child to fulfill GOD’s Promise by using her Slave Hagar.

Sarah was the one, who laughed, identifying Isaac the fulfillment of GOD’s Promise with Laughter.

Sarah was then the one to demand that Hagar and Ishmael be banished.

What if, Sarah, seeing Abraham taking her son for the sacrifice, followed at a distance, and when she saw what Isaac was about to do, What If Sarah was the Angel placing a Ram in the bushes behind Abraham?