

Whom do you trust? How many people do you trust? I am not talking about how many you know, or how many friends we have. I am not suggesting that this has to be family. Who do you really trust? Who, if they told you, they would do the most impossible, totally illogical and inconceivable, thing for you, that you trust they would make it happen, because you trust them and they trust you.

We are surrounded by so many betrayals. So much lying and fraud. So many who are phony. But also, we each carry a lifetime of baggage, wounds, that rightly guard us from being hurt again. So, when we have been wounded, when we have been hurt, how do you trust again?

The fundamental thrust of Genesis, of the Old Testament, of the Bible: is reestablishment of relationship between GOD and Humanity; ONCE Brokenness has happened... AFTER there is hurt... ONCE SIN is in the world... Can we ever again have UNCONDITIONAL TRUST?

Except in Genesis RECONCILIATION is between GOD and ABRAHAM, his son, grandson, great grandson; in the Old Testament ISRAEL was intended to be the means between GOD and all the Nations; in the New Testament the relationship is made personal between GOD and each of us through Jesus Christ.

The great 20th Century Theologian Karl Barth described that "RECONCILIATION IS ABOUT RESTITUTION. Resumption of Relationship, Trust, which once existed, but then was threatened with dissolution, death."

The author of Genesis made a point of telling us earlier, that Abram was 75 years of age when GOD first called him at HARAN: GO, leave home, family, community and Nation to follow where GOD would lead. Many of us in Green Valley at age 60, 65, 70, 75 left the home, careers we established over a lifetime, even broke with family and community of decades, to follow GOD HERE.

At 86, his wife Sarai tried to manipulate process for ABRAM, by abusing her slave HAGAR, and in so doing the relationship between Abram and Sarai was threatened by having another woman and her son.

Now at 99, when the PROMISE seems IMPOSSIBLE, ILLOGICAL, INCONCEIVABLE, GOD repeats the promise a 3rd time, RE-AFFIRMING the covenant that they would give birth to a MIRACLE.

This couple are deeply flawed, yet for nearly 25 years they have remained UNCONDITIONALLY FAITHFUL to GOD's Promise, with no evidence they will ever be parents of a single child, let alone a Nation. Their TRUST of GOD is counted for them as UNCONDITIONAL FAITH.

There are a series of backstories to this. By promising the COVENANT to be fulfilled with a Child to SARAI, HAGAR and her 13 year old ISHMAEL are guaranteed to be removed. And yet, GOD's care for them remains constant. While Sarai banishes them from her home, GOD has more than one blessing to bestow, and ABRAHAM will be the FATHER of JUDAISM, ISLAM and CHRISTIANITY.

There is also the covenant of MALE CIRCUMCISION. The Torah provides no explanation for why; only the nonnegotiable promise that those who fail to be circumcised in their most intimate flesh will have broken covenant.

In this passage, with the 3rd affirmation of the relationship, the COVENANT takes on new meaning, and everyone receives a new NAME. In Hebrew Culture, a 3rd Affirmation becomes LAW. There might conceivably be a situation when joking you could say something you did not mean. There might be occasion when you try to explain the first, and say something a 2nd time.

A 3rd time, is LAW! SARAI becomes SARAH meaning Princess. ABRAM whose name was FATHER becomes ABRAHAM, now FATHER of MANY NATIONS. GOD takes the new name EL SHADDAI meaning LORD, GOD ALMIGHTY! The Covenant that They would have a great Name, a Great People, in a Great Land that all seemed impossible, now carries with it pregnancy with a new life! Few at our ages are willing to take on a NEW PUPPY, can you imagine the miracle of conceiving and raising a next generation at this time?

I recall 30 some years ago, when our kids were 1 and 3. Our Director of Music was debuting as Musical Conductor at the University and we went to the performance. It was August and we sat with the children in our laps, getting hotter and hotter, when at Intermission we tried to go outside and both Urped all over us. The following day, Monday I told the story to my Secretary who was a wonderful faithful woman in her early 60s. After telling her my tale of woe, she told me, she and her husband had finally taken a weekend away, trusting their now daughter and her brother to take care of their home. When they returned, they found the trees covered in toilet paper, broken windows, the door off the hinges, with a note that the Police had broken up the party, and to come to the Police Station. On the way home, their 15 year old daughter shared the news that "By the way, I am Pregnant!" And can you imagine what Phyllis and her husband did? Knowing this adopted daughter was unable to raise a child herself, they raised the next generation starting at age 63.

Last week, I attempted to explain to the Monday Bible Reflections that the Gospel of Mark is different. The Gospel of Mark is the first Gospel written down, and they do so because in the year 70 the Temple at Jerusalem had been destroyed. Everything they had ever known was counter-cultural. Galilee had long been filled with people wanting to overturn the Roman dominance, to riot and have insurrection. 60 years before the final destruction of the Temple, when Jesus would have been a child, the Romans had held a Crucifixion where they hung 2000 people to die.

Jesus describes to his disciples that to be the Messiah means His rejection, torture and death.

Can't you just see Peter trying to put his arm around Jesus telling him "You've got this all wrong. This is how we are going to make our fortune, as Messiah you are Son of David; we are going to take over the World!" The way to victory is the way to power and dominance, might makes right...

And Jesus says "NO!" Speaking to the Crowd, Jesus speaks to all of us: "We must deny self."

Self has been the problem since the Garden of Eden. 20 years ago, we talked about the ME Generation...

Mark's Gospel is the only one, which begins with Jesus as being a MAN, a simple Carpenter, who after baptism goes into the wilderness to try to understand, "What does it mean to ME to be the Messiah?" The 40 days of Temptation are 40 days of Jesus questioning, "If I have all of this power, what should I do?"

The subtlety of Mark's Gospel is that while 3 times Jesus professes that to be the Messiah means he must be put to death, that whole section is bracketed by miracles of Jesus RESTORING SIGHT TO THE BLIND. The first of these, describes the healing, needing to be accomplished in two phases. After the first laying on of hands, the man can see, but not clearly, "people look like Trees Walking" and Jesus lays hands on him a second time, that he can now see clearly, just as described by Paul in 1st Corinthians, "Now we see as in a mirror dimly but then we shall see face to face."

A significant piece of RECONCILIATION, of REBUILDING TRUST is Recognizing one another anew. How different the world looks from when we trusted one another because we had never been hurt by each other, never been bit by a dog, given our heart because that was what we wanted to do; AND after we have been hurt, bitten, felt abandoned, and we are asked to TRUST the same person/circumstance ANEW.

Something amazing has happened in our church! That which a year ago, 3, 5 seemed illogical, impossible! Recognize the circumstance in the world, that Churches are closing in record numbers, the number of ministers retiring far exceeds those going to Seminary. Over the last 20 years there had been a great deal of loss and hurt and divisiveness, the Body of Christ that is the church itself was wounded. Because many of you carried the faith through those times, and there is now Fresh VISION, miraculously we can consider what others would consider inconceivable: We can DREAM NEW DREAMS! What would you like to see?