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**Weekend of Sunday, February 28, 2021**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent /Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**  
**First Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**  
**Second Reading: Romans 4:13-25**  
**Gospel Reading: Mark 8:31-38**  
**Sermon Title: “Abrahamic Covenant”**

**Theme**

*The second covenant in this year’s Lenten readings is the one made with Abraham and Sarah: God’s promise to make them the ancestors of many, with whom God will remain in everlasting covenant. Paul says this promise comes to all who share Abraham’s faith in the God who brings life into being where there was no life. We receive this baptismal promise of resurrection life in faith. Sarah and Abraham receive new names as a sign of the covenant, and we too get new identities in baptism, as we put on Christ.*

**Text**

**Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

<sup>1</sup>When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. <sup>2</sup>And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” <sup>3</sup>Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, <sup>4</sup>“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup>No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup>I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”

<sup>15</sup>God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup>I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

**Romans 4:13-25**

<sup>13</sup>The promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup>If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup>For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

<sup>16</sup>For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, <sup>17</sup>as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup>Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” <sup>19</sup>He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. <sup>20</sup>No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup>Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” <sup>23</sup>Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup>but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup>who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

## Sermon

Most mainline Christian denominations recognize five major covenants that God made with humankind. And a few of them show up in the readings for Lent and so I have decided to preach a five-week series on those five major covenants. Today is the second in the series and the covenant we are going to look at today is known as the *Abrahamic Covenant*, and it should come as no surprise to you that the covenant was made between God and Abraham.

Before I get into the details of the *Abrahamic Covenant*, I would like to continue the history lesson that I started last week in the sermon entitled the *Noahic Covenant* because it is important to know that these five covenants are not independent unrelated actions of God, but parts of the ongoing story of God and God's creation, and more specifically, humankind.

As you know from last week's sermon, God was disgusted by the sinfulness of humankind and attempted to give creation a re-boot by flooding the whole earth. The re-boot was accomplished through one surviving man by the name of Noah, who had "found favor in the sight of the LORD," and his family. Sadly, Noah's wife is not named, but let's call her Joan – of ark, but his sons are named, and their names are Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

After the re-boot, Noah's family grew for several generations until his descendants decided to attempt to build a huge ziggurat, a pyramid temple, whose summit was believed to be the gateway to heaven, the realm of the gods. Listen to this amusing passage from the voice of God:

Genesis 11:6-9 the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup>So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup>Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

So, in their confusion, the three tribes of the descendants of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, went their separate ways.

The descendants of *Japheth* became coastland dwellers of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and their most famous offspring were the Philistines, the future enemy of David and the Israelites.

The descendants of *Ham* occupied the Egyptian territory and their offspring included the Ninevites, Babylonians, and the Assyrians, future occupying nations of Israel.

The descendants of *Shem* became the Hebrews, who later became known as the Israelites and generally settled in what is Israel today.

It shouldn't surprise us but isn't it interesting how all these nations that we read about in the Old Testament started as one family? So God's solution to the arrogance of humankind was to separate them like we do our ornery children, but that did nothing to draw God's people back into a life of love lived out through obedience to God. What to do?

It is against this background of a broken, divided, and scattered family that Abraham first shows up in scripture in the middle of Genesis chapter 11 as Abram – more on his name change in a moment. We can tell that Abram is someone special because until Abram is mentioned, chapter 11 is nothing more than a genealogical list of the descendants of Shem, the oldest son of Noah, one name after another, until Abram. After Abram is mentioned, the writer begins to get more detailed.

God chose Abram because he was a faithful man (Romans 4:13-25), through whom God was willing to give humankind another chance. And so God made a covenant between God and Abram that we call the *Abrahamic Covenant* and it first appears in Genesis 12.

Genesis 12:1 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. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I 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."

So in summary, the *Abrahamic Covenant* included the:

1. The promise of land (v.1)
2. The promise of descendants (v.2)
3. The promise of blessing and redemption (v.2b-3)

When God made this covenant with Abram, Abram was 75 years old.

Moving on to today's First Reading from Genesis 17, we find that not much has changed except that Abram is now 99 years old. He and Sarai, his wife, were still childless, though Abram and Sarai tried to help God out by fathering a child with Hagar, Sarai's slave. But God didn't need any help, and in this passage, God reminded them of that, and further sealed the deal by changing their names. Abram became Abraham, and Sarai became Sarah. Yea, I know not very dramatic, but it symbolized a change in the covenant.

A couple of chapters later, in chapter 21, the old couple, Abraham and Sarah conceived and bore a child whom they named Isaac. Isaac would grow up to have a son named Jacob, and God would change Jacob's name to Israel, and Israel would have twelve sons who would become the twelve patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel who would eventually take possession of the land promised to Abraham.

All well and good Pastor, but what has any of this to do with us. I'm so glad you asked. What this story tells us is that:

God loves God's creation and especially God's highest creation, humankind. God created humankind out of love, but included in God's love for humankind is the ability for humankind to choose to love God back.

Loving God back equates to obedience. We, humankind, have proven to be terrible at loving God back through our obedience.

But God's love cannot be frustrated, and so God historically has come up with covenants with humankind to win back our obedience and affection. So far, we've heard about the *Noahic Covenant*, a reboot to creation, but humankind went right back to disobedience. And today in our study of the *Abrahamic Covenant*, we see the beginning of God starting over again through one faithful man by the name of

Abraham, through whom God promised to build a new nation holy and devoted to God. This covenant, the *Abrahamic Covenant*, is seen as the start of the relationship between God and the Hebrews as God's chosen people that will become better articulated in the *Mosaic Covenant* that we will look at next week.

Allow me to ask you a question; has anything I said today or anything you know about biblical history to this point – mid-Genesis, given you the indication that humankind has figured out how to love God back through obedience? Nope! So do you think the gate to the Garden of Eden is still closed? Yep, it's still closed.

Already some of you are thinking "Why does God keep giving humankind second chances?" I will answer that question with a question; "to you that are parents, isn't this how you parent your children? You pick 'em up, maybe you give them a swat on their bottom, or put them in time out, or take away something, and you give them another chance. Do you expect them to learn from their mistakes? Yes! Do they? No!" Oh! So you do understand what I am talking about! And let me remind you, you were no different, and your grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be no different.

Each week of Lent we begin our service with confession and we say these words, "Most merciful God, we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves."

It's beginning to sound like it's always been this way, doesn't it? As far as this sermon series goes, God made two covenants with humankind and our status hasn't changed yet. God is going to have to come up with another, better plan because without it the gate to the Garden of Eden remains closed and we are lost.

Come back next week, when we will hear about the *Mosaic Covenant*.

## **Prayer**

God of Abraham and Sarah, you love your creation and you are right to expect our love and obedience in response. Yet we are distracted by many things. Bless us in our Lenten disciplines so that we are drawn to love you more and serve you with our obedience. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen