

Second Sunday in Lent, February 28, 2021
“Making the Impossible Possible” (Genesis 17, Mark 8:31-38)

Abram and Sarai were old. There’s no other way to say it. Even by modern standards they were old. Abram was 99 and Sarai was 90. Let’s try to picture them standing in front of us. Abram is mostly bald. What little hair is left is white. And his beard is long and white. He moves slowly with the assistance of a cane. Sarai’s hair is also long and white. She is stooped over, not having been able to stand upright for years. Both of them have wrinkles – or should I say wisdom lines – running across their faces. And having no access to dentures around 2000 BC, their lips are drawn in because they have no teeth to support them.

They are an old, wrinkled up couple, and they have no children. They have never had any... no descendants whatsoever. At their 75th wedding anniversary celebration, there were no children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren; just some great nieces and nephews.

Now it just so happened that God wanted to make a nation. And even though Abram and Sarai were old and barren, God decided that they were the perfect couple with which to start. The perfect couple? Perfect for what, we might ask. God’s purpose was to create a nation, a new race of people created to serve God’s will, a chosen people that were holy and set apart for God’s use. To make this nation, God would begin by giving a special child to just the right couple. This was a child of promise who would bear the promise of God’s grace and who was destined to father a nation.

With all due respect to Abram and Sarai, by human standards they were not the perfect couple to receive this child of promise. Imagine, if you will, that you are an adoption agent and you have been given the job of placing this child of destiny with a family. Would you choose an elderly couple? He’s almost 100 and she’s not far behind. Would you place this child with a couple that has no experience raising children? Would you let a family that lives in a tent adopt this child? Of course not! Because human standards demand just the opposite.

You would find a younger couple, perhaps in their late 20’s or early 30’s. After all...you would like to think the parents would still be alive to see this child graduate from high school. You might even want them to already have some well-adjusted children because that would demonstrate good parenting skills. You would also choose a couple that is not leading the life of a nomad and moving around all the time.

By human standards, an elderly, childless, nomadic couple is anything but the perfect couple. By human standards Abram and Sarai are the last couple to start with in making a nation. But by God’s standards, they are the perfect couple. That’s because God works in a different way and with different criteria than people do. People look for the most favorable situation, a situation where there is already hope and life, a situation where the desired goal – in this case, descendants – already seems possible. But God doesn’t work that way. God is a God of miracles. And sometimes God starts with what looks like to us the most impossible and the most helpless situations. Our Heavenly Father is the God who makes the impossible possible, the God who brings life out of lifelessness, the God who makes the hopeless hopeful.

You see, by God's standards Abram and Sarai were the perfect couple. Even though they were as good as dead, God makes the impossible happen. Anyone could produce a nation from a young couple. But only God could do it with a couple like Abram and Sarai. And there would be no mistaking whose nation this was.

Jesus' death and resurrection is another example of God making the impossible possible, of bringing hope out of hopelessness, and bringing life out of death. Jesus tried to explain this to his disciples. He told them plainly that the Son of Man must suffer and die, and on the third day rise. But this didn't make sense to them. Jesus was the Messiah...destined to be a great King, and great kings don't die before they have been crowned. By human standards, the Messiah was supposed to go to Jerusalem, conquer the Romans, and establish the kingdom of God.

That's the way humans think...but not the way God thinks. Jesus explained God's plan to the disciples. He was going to Jerusalem – not a great idea the disciples thought, but that was OK. But once in Jerusalem, he told them, he would be rejected, die on a cross, and on the third day rise. By human standards...that just didn't add up. Human standards demanded that he have a palace and an army – things a mighty king should have. But according to God's standards, what awaited the King of Kings in Jerusalem were a cross and a tomb instead.

It has been said the Christianity is the only religion that has taken an instrument of torture and turned it into an object of beauty. We decorate our churches with crosses and we wear them around our necks. But the cross on which our Lord died was not an object of beauty. It was a means of execution designed to torture people to death in the most painful and lengthy way possible. Yet God took this instrument of torture and sin and turned it into a means by which sin is forgiven. Through the cross God brings an end to our eternal separation from our Creator. And then God took the tomb, a place of death and decay, and transformed it into a womb that brings forth eternal life.

That is God's way of doing things. God brings hope out of hopelessness. God creates light out of darkness. God makes the impossible possible and brings forth life from lifelessness.

We all have situations in our lives that seem hopeless. Perhaps our family life, or our marriage, or our declining health, or our job, seems to be a hopeless case. Perhaps our spiritual life feels dead and lifeless. Sometimes it feels like darkness is all around us. But, you see, these are the perfect situations for God to work. God specializes in bringing life out of death and hope out of hopelessness. He majors in making the impossible possible.

God seeks for us to turn it over to him. But we must understand that when we do, we will be changed. God changed Abram and Sarai. They went from childlessness to being the parents of a great nation. They went from being as good as dead to bringing forth new life. They went from being nobody's people to being God's people. And God changed their names as a sign of this transformation. God changed them and God will change us. God can truly bring life into the deadness of our souls. After all, it is God who offers us eternal life through the death of his Son.

By human standards, you and I deserve only punishment. We have broken God's laws. We have failed to love him and others. When we break our human laws, there are consequences. When we

break our relationship with others there are also consequences. The consequence of our sin against God is that it separates us from God. Nothing we can do on our own can make us worthy before God. It is impossible for us to do so. But with God, it is possible. Using an old rugged cross, God paid the price for our sins. And using an empty tomb to bring forth new life, he gives us the promise that death is not the end for us.

When we accept his Son, Jesus the Christ, and put our whole trust in him, God will take the deadness and darkness in us and transform it into light and life. And our heavenly Father will make hope possible in all things, even if things are impossibly hopeless. That is simply the nature of the God who loves each of us dearly. Thanks be to God. Amen.