

Sermon for 18 June 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday after Pentecost/Father's Day

Scriptures: Genesis 18:1-15 (21:1-7); Psalm 116, 1-2,12-19; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:2

"More complicated"

Last Sunday we left a comfortably developing history lesson with Father Abram and his wife Sarai following their new path, as God told them, into a place far from home and kindred, out of trust in God; the Apostle Paul reminding everyone that it was before the Ten Commandments or the tradition of holy Law that they went by ... faith, in other words, not specific religious practices ... and Jesus not only healing and even resurrecting people, but being friends with all sorts of folks, not just well-behaved ones ...

It was a nice start to the season of Ordinary Time we'll be in until the end of next November.

But today it starts getting complicated right away. Three strangers visit Abram's tent and predict that the aged couple will have a son, which is outlandish ... and sure enough, next year Sarah gives birth to Isaac, and Psalm 116 gives us a way to give thanks in such a time of rejoicing.

Not a bad complication ... but then Paul's Letter to the Romans gets awesome, as he tries to say the most incredible thing about God and us. Out of the blue, God's allowed God's one child ... the Messiah, Jesus as we know him ... to die .. and not just to die, which is astounding enough, but to die for unfinished, mistaken, scruffy folks such as us ...current humankind you and me, in other words. Just a small fact we'll be spending the rest of our time beginning to receive and gradually to see for what it can only be described as: Not sensible, not even natural, but out of love, pure and simple, on God's part.

So Ordinary Time is now off-the-wall exceptional, and we'll spend the rest of history learning to trust and grow and grasp its breadth.

As completion --- remember we said last week that when we live by faith, only certain we can trust by God's grace ? --- today's Gospel gives a long description of Jesus choosing disciples and sending them out empowered to do his work, free of charge, untrained, trusting ... like Abraham and Sarah, the old childless couple with the beautiful young baby... and all the rest of those Jesus folks like you and me.

I should stop there. Ask ourselves: Are we ready for this? Will it ever get any clearer? Does it get easier as they.. as Jesus himself ... or as any of us Jesus people ... go along? What does it say? "Brother will betray brother ..." "but the one who endures to the end..." what? "will be saved." That's our life.

Let us pray.

Holy God, you have done it again. You have guided faithful people to write, and preserve, and live by, scriptures that frighten us when they inspire us. You have given us spiritual insight in big doses and in little insights in the early dawn and on the darkest night. Here you are today, bringing us close the day before something we dread and the night we look forward to ... You keep pushing us to pray more so we can breathe more fully and yes, love more honestly. You never give up on us. As far as we can see, that's everything up ahead, and it's beautiful like nothing else we've ever found. There's Father's Day ... help us make good use of that ... and Juneteenth ... help us lead our nation in a fuller celebration of its story as we recognize all the fresh needs among all the peoples... and yes, the hopes for better treatment of all, from handicapped to minority, from poor health to beautiful growth and development beyond our wildest dreams.

Incredible! You love us. You want us around. Forever. Teach us, Jesus. Heal us. Love us.

Complicated. Simple. For certain. Love. Almighty. Forever.

Amen.