

Sermon for Lent 2B
Sunday, February 25, 2024
“Let God make the impossible possible”

Texts: Genesis 17:1-7,15-16; Mark 8:31-38

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last Sunday we began the Season of Lent with a call to put aside our selfish desires, and wants, to let go of those things in our lives that consume our attention in order to help us refocus our attention on God and recognize our dependence on him. Today, the lessons draw us further into the message of our dependence on God with the story of Abraham and Sarah and the scene in Jesus’ life when he tells his disciples that he must suffer, die, and rise again and to be his disciples, they must take up their own crosses to follow him. The message from these stories is that when we let God take control, God will make possible the things that *we think* are impossible.

Scripture tells us that Abram was ninety-nine years old and his wife, Sarai, was presumably younger than he was, but not by much, and they had been married for a very long time. So she was old. And, from the time that Sarai was introduced as his wife, six chapters prior in Chapter 11, she was said to be barren; she could not bear children. Even if Sarai were not barren, she would surely have been post-menopausal by this point—she would have passed the “change of life.” In fact, they were so sure that Sarai would never have children that thirteen years prior, Sarai told Abram to lie with her slave girl, Hagar, which he did, and Hagar bore a son whom they named Ishmael.

But, God had a plan from way back. Several times God told Abram directly or through angels that he would have many descendants: “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.” (Genesis 12:2) “I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth.” (Genesis 13:16a) “You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.” (Genesis 17:4b) At this point, God changed his name from Abram, which means “exalted ancestor” to Abraham, meaning “ancestor of a multitude.” And God changed Sarai’s name, which refers to a female chieftan, to Sarah, which means “noblewoman.” But it didn’t stop there! Next, Abraham and Sarah will be visited by three angels who will tell them, “your wife Sarah shall have a son.” (Genesis 18:9b) Sarah laughed at this and Abraham was in disbelief. The scripture even says, “Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.” (Genesis 18:11) But God made possible the thing that they thought was impossible. Sarah conceived and bore a son, and they named him Isaac. Isaac was the grandfather of the twelve sons (tribes) of Israel; one of the sons (Judah) would be the ancestor of David, who in turn, was an ancestor of both Mary and Joseph.

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus warns his disciples of the fate he must endure: his passion and death, but also his resurrection. Of course, they don’t want to believe this. Peter rebuked Jesus. But Jesus dished it right back: “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” (Mark 8:33b) The idea

that someone could be put to death and then come back from the dead didn't seem possible to them. They had to be prepared to endure a life of isolation, rejection, and even persecution; taking up their crosses to follow Jesus would take strength, endurance, and wisdom that they may not have believed they had. Jesus needed his disciples to believe that God could make possible the things they thought were impossible.

Our own lives can sometimes feel similar, especially when we are faced with a sudden change, like a new job, a new baby, an unexpected diagnosis, or the death of a loved one, that places us in a "new normal." We start worrying about how things will turn out. We get tied up in knots because we think the difficulties we face are too great to overcome. The tragedies that befall us make us feel so horrible that we don't think we can go on. The bills keep piling up and we don't know where we'll get the money to pay them. We keep getting bad news about our health. Our crosses seem too heavy to bear. But no matter what is taking place in our lives, no matter how hard it seems, we have to believe and know that God can make possible the things that we think are impossible. God can make a way out of no way.

Indeed, we do have hope. All we have to do is let go of the things that distract us. We have to stop thinking that what lies ahead is dark, bleak, tragic, or impossible to overcome, and trust that God will provide everything we need. We have to know that God makes possible those things that we think are impossible. Amen.