

Sermon 3/7/21
Between Me and You
Pastor Tony Fields, Sr.

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

Abram's new name means "father of many." If God changed your name, what would you want it to mean? (Gen 17:5)

Naming, covenant, and faith focus today's scripture. With words of covenant and promise God changes Abram's name to Abraham and Saria's name to Sarah. The Psalmist declares God's name, praying the whole world to come back to God in humble Faithfulness. Paul declares openly that God's promises to Abraham were due to his faith and not the law. Jesus reprimands Peter; get behind me, Satan, for Peter was putting human ways above God's. In these scriptures, new names are symbolic of new journeys of the proclamation of faith and promises of covenantal relationships. These texts invite us to remain steadfast in faith during spiritual journeys with God even as God's call and covenant transform us.

God's voice names us in holy love. Let's be honest from generation to generation God names us and claims us. If only we can train our ears to hear Your call and tune our hearts to open at the sound of God's voice. If only we believe and trust that You called us to be Your children of the covenant, heirs with Your Son, and disciples of Your grace.

Genesis is a book about the beginning: the beginning of humankind, the onset of Israel, and the beginning of the relationship between God and a particular people.

Genesis 17 explains the story of the election of Abraham as the patriarch from whom many nations would descend and who became the first father of three great faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It also tells the story of Sarah's selection as the woman through whom Israel, the chosen people in their telling of their own story, will be born.

At the same time that Genesis focuses on one particular family, it also draws connections between all the world's peoples. The Torah and the rest of the scriptures will claim that while the God of Israel has a unique friendship with Israel, the God of Israel is the God of all the world.

In Abraham, God chose a man many today would not choose for a religious leader. As I mention this, I must look into my mirror because we all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Even the first man, Adam, failed in the beautiful Garden of Eden. Abram is not my favorite of the Bible. However, his imperfections do not limit God's plan.

Abraham answered God's call, trusting in a God he may not have formerly comprehended, one Who was one of many in his Chaldean (pre-Babylonian) homeland in what would later become Iraq. The text makes clear that Sarah is not a silent partner in this venture. She has strong opinions and speaks her mind, and she chooses to accompany Abraham on the journey of a lifetime following the voice of God. She is a full partner in this endeavor.

However, listen to God's proposition to Abram because Abram will only be a conduit of God's plan for humanity. Go back and read the book of Genesis. You will see two imperfect people. However, God the Great El- Shaddai, Elohim, Adonai will share His plan for humanity. Sisters and brothers, we are privileged to hear this conversation. Please don't miss this! The all-knowing God said, "I will make my covenant between You and me."

As a final addendum, I would like to make a note about names. In one sense, the literal meaning of these Hebrew names can be important for supplementing the message in the story. For example, the name Abram can be translated as "exalted father," but the name change to Abraham, "father of multitudes," matches God's promise of many descendants for Abraham. (For Sarah, the correlation between the name and the text is not as apparent: Sarai most likely means "my princess" and Sarah means "princess.")