25 February – 2 March 2024 Trusting God when we don’t understand

Genesis 17- 1-7, 15-16

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty[a]; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. 2 Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

3 Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 4 “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. 5 No longer will you be called Abram[b]; your name will be Abraham,[c] for I have made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

15 God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

Bible notes

The story of Abram-who-becomes-Abraham provides us with the origins of the people of God, the people of whom we, many centuries later, are a part. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave his home, family and country to set out for a land ‘that I will show you’, with the promise of being made a great nation. Over the ensuing chapters Abram travels and adventures at God’s direction, and the promise is clarified: Abram, who is both elderly and currently childless, will have descendants as numerous as the stars. Today’s reading from chapter 17 concentrates the promise into a covenant, a formal agreement between God and Abram, with responsibilities on either side. Abram is to follow God – this is his side of the covenant. In response, God will give Abram many descendants. Unlike the covenant made with Noah (see last week), this covenant entails both relationship and choice.

God then expands on this covenant: Abram’s descendants will include nations and kings, and they will be given land (v.8). As a sign of this covenant Abram and his household and descendants must be circumcised (vv.9-14) – a common practice, given a new significance. For future generations, performing circumcision at eight days old makes clear that the child has done nothing to earn their place in the covenant, it is all down to God. This is grace.

The changing of names, from Abram (‘exalted ancestor’) to Abraham (‘father of a multitude’), and from Sarai (‘quarrelsome’) to Sarah (‘princess’), is a demonstration of trust. Names, back then, said something about their owners. These name changes are not because of what God has done; they are in anticipation of it. We may not know how God’s promises will be kept, but there is a call to choose to believe them nonetheless.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

In the film Dead Poet’s Society, the actor and comedian Robin Williams plays the inspirational (and real) English teacher, John Keating, who uses unorthodox teaching methods in a boy’s boarding school. He gets the students to stand on their desks to demonstrate a way to look at things differently. He gets them to rip out prescriptive introductions in poetry books to discover their own ways to appreciate. The strict headmaster ends up getting rid of Keating. The creativity of the boys is repressed. The film ends with the boys defiantly standing on their desks to honour their departing teacher. How does Jesus teach us to look at life differently and from God’s perspective? How can we find a different place to stand to see things differently?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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• What do you think this is?

• How do we respond to seeing things we don’t quite understand?

• How can we trust God, when we do not fully understand God’s ways?

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

Incredible God, we thank you and praise you for trusting in us even when we find it hard to trust in you. **Amen.**  
We thank you and praise you for offering us more than we could ever imagine. **Amen.**  
We thank you and praise you for making the impossible possible. **Amen.**  
We thank you and praise you for all the blessings of youth and of age. **Amen.**  
We thank you and praise you for everything – in Jesus’ name.  
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Loving God,  
Thank you for the wonderful times,  
when our hearts are singing.  
Thank you also,  
that you are with us in the difficult times,  
when we are confused and don’t understand.  
Help us to feel your presence – at all times.  
Help us to hear your guidance and learn to trust you,  
knowing that good times will come again.  
**Amen.**

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