

MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE BIBLE #2

The God of the Covenant

By David Carlson

In the late 18th century, a belief called Deism became popular in Europe and America. Deists believed that there is a God, but after this God created the world, He withdrew and left the universe to run on its own. God was considered somewhat of a “watchmaker,” a Creative Being who made the universe like a complicated watch, but now lets the mechanism run without interference.

In the Deist view, God is distant, even aloof from the world. Thankfully, the God of the Bible and our Christian faith is completely different from the Deist understanding. The God of the Bible is constantly seeking to enter into a relationship with us. In fact, the entire Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, can be understood as a series of relationships, or covenants, that God has entered into with humanity.

What an amazing thought. The God of this vast universe wants to have a relationship with us! Without such a relationship, we would search in vain for a meaningful life. We would be completely lost. Because God wishes to establish a covenant with us, we can be “found.” Each of the covenants in the Bible helps us understand what God offers us and what God asks of us.

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

A covenant is an agreement between two parties, and, as with all agreements, a covenant comes with benefits and responsibilities. One of the first covenant relationships mentioned in the Bible is the one God established with Abraham and Sarah, and we learn a great deal about faith from their story.

In Genesis 12:1-3, a covenant is offered by God with Abraham and Sarah. When we study these verses carefully, we can see that God has made three promises to Abraham and Sarah. The first promise is that Abraham and Sarah would have a homeland, a “promised land,” of their own. Nothing could have been more welcome to Abraham and Sarah who had been nomadic wanderers.

The second promise is that Abraham and Sarah will have many descendants that will become a great nation, an amazing prospect for this elderly and childless couple. The third promise, however, is even broader. Nations of the world will be blessed by God if they bless Abraham and Sarah’s descendants. This final promise can also be translated, “The nations of the world will be blessed through the descendants of Abraham and Sarah.” Here we see that God’s ultimate purpose is not just to bless Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants, but to bless the entire world.

What amazing benefits God promised to Abraham and Sarah in this early covenant. But the covenant arrangement comes with a responsibility. All these wonderful changes will take place in their lives if, and only if, Abraham and Sarah are willing to trust God and leave the familiar lands of their ancestors and move out into the unknown. God would bless them if they were willing to put Him first in their lives.

TO TRUST OR NOT TO TRUST

We can learn a great deal about faith from Abraham and Sarah. In the chapters that follow Genesis 12:1-3, we read stories of Abraham and Sarah trusting in God but also stories of their failing to trust in God. They were not always faithful to God, but God was always faithful to them.

God offers a similar covenant with each of us. God desires to bless us, more than we could ever imagine. But, as was true of Abraham and Sarah, we must do our part. We can choose to trust God or not trust Him. We can put God first in our lives and trust God when He calls us to move out into the unknown or we can refuse.

Certainly, this is what Holy Trinity experienced in our recent building campaign. Much as was true of Abraham and Sarah, we journeyed as a community of faith “under His gaze.” And God has certainly blessed us more than we could ever imagine.

What is true of us as the Holy Trinity Parish is true of us as individuals. As someone expressed it, God delights in doing extraordinary things through ordinary people. Abraham and Sarah were ordinary people, sometimes faithful and sometimes faithless. From these Saints of the Old Testament, we learn that having faith in God is not easy. Leaving the familiar for the unknown always feels risky. But God promises to bless the lives of those who take the step of faith.