

Sunday, March 1, 2015

This passage from Genesis this morning tells us the story of God's covenant with Abram. The chapter begins with God identifying God self to Abram, then commands Abraham to live entirely before God, this language is a change from previous "just" men who walked with God. God then bestows on Abram a new name, that of Abraham. This not only implies the power of the one who gives the new name, but also a new direction, a new phase in one's life. The reading ends with the newly named Abraham laughing when told about the birth of a son. This shows how sometimes we see the power of God in a way that makes us laugh and shake our heads in disbelief, as if a great joke is being played upon us.

Genesis 17: 1-7. 15-17

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God showed up and said to him, "I am The Strong God, live entirely before me, live to the hilt! ²I'll make a covenant between us and I'll give you a huge family."

³Overwhelmed, Abram fell flat on his face. Then God said to him, ⁴"This is my covenant with you: You'll be the father of many nations. ⁵Your name will no longer be Abram, but Abraham, meaning that 'I'm making you the father of many nations.' ⁶I'll make you a father of fathers—I'll make nations from you, kings will issue from you. ⁷I'm establishing my covenant between me and you, a covenant that includes your descendants, a covenant that goes on and on and on, a covenant that commits me to be your God and the God of your descendants.

¹⁵God continued speaking to Abraham, "And Sarai your wife: Don't call her Sarai any longer; call her Sarah. ¹⁶I'll bless her—yes! I'll give you a son by her! Oh, how I'll bless her! Nations will come from her; kings of nations will come from her."

¹⁷Abraham fell flat on his face. And then he laughed, thinking, "Can a hundred-year-old man father a son? And can Sarah, at ninety years, have a baby?"

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.
THANKS BE TO GOD!

SERMON – "GOD OF EVERYONE"

So this morning I am going to talk about identity and who we each are in this world of ours, but first I want to talk about something completely different, well sort of completely different.

But I am going to begin with my usual pop culture reference as I want to talk about Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta who is also known by her stage name of Lady Gaga. Lady Gaga was born in 1986 in New York City, Manhattan to be exact. She is a singer and songwriter who focuses on mainly pop and dance music, but she is best known for some of the really strange things that we have seen her do in the past. She is the individual who showed up at the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards wearing what the media dubbed the infamous "meat dress," which was a dress made out of raw meat.

She was also the person who in 2011 spent 72 hours inside an egg before the Grammy awards from which she emerged during her performance. Now these are all very strange things and Lady Gaga's identity, for some, will be forever linked to these events and for some these events have coloured how we view Lady Gaga as a singer. There are those who think that the only reason she resorts to such theatrics is because she can't really sing. Then we have last Sunday at the Academy Awards broadcast when Lady Gaga came out in a very simple gown and beautifully sang a medley of songs from "The Sound of Music." It seemed like social media just blew up around this, I remember reading comments about how many people did not know she could even sing, let alone like that. Others talked about how some people are now going to be forced to respect her true talent as an artist. For many the person whom they thought they know had changed. The identity that they were so comfortable putting someone else into has shifted.

This is where we come to the passage from Genesis today. Abram and Saria are going along their own way when God comes along and literally changes their identity. God gives them new names, Abraham and Sarah, and God gives them a completely new direction in life, God sends them in a direction that they can hardly believe, so much so that Abraham laughs out loud at the absurdity of what God is saying. And yet here we are with God giving Abraham and Sarah new identities, identities which will lead them to places they had never even considered in their own lives, or had given up on.

We all have identities, those ways that others understand who we are, yet we also have an identity as people of God, an identity that is intimately tied to love that God has for us and that God is always with us. We much like Abraham and Sarah have identities that are given to us by God. But if this is the case, how then do we understand when we begin to count some identities as being less. Much like those who thought that Lady Gaga as an artist was all theatrics and no talent, they gave her less thought, less of a voice than those they deemed as more worthy. How do we sometimes see some identities as being "less than" and therefore we give them less of a voice. Abraham and Sarah were old, and yet God used them to fulfill a promise, God made them the mother of father of many nations. If we had been on the sidelines and had heard that God was going to make a couple the mother and father of a multitude of nations, how many of us would have dismissed Abraham and Sarah? How many of us would not have even given them a second look? Yet had we done that we might have missed the amazing work that God was doing in the world. Where do we find God? Sometimes we find God in those who we have dismissed, those whose identities we view as "less than."