

Sermon
"Ice Cubes in Puerto Rico"
Pastor Lynn Rubier Capron
Sept. 15, 2019

Gen 15:1-6; Hebrews 11: 8 -22

Building things God's Way.

We are on the second Sunday of our three week series that explores how God and people get things done together.

Last week, we remembered what it means that God has two steps in God's creation process:
Because God creates from nothing ... we know God has the power to make new and unexpected things happen.

And, because God first created the basic elements of chaos and then organized them into our beautiful inhabitable world, we know that God is not just any creator, but the builder of worlds that are good.

Trust that, even when the elements of chaos get out of hand, we can place our feet firmly on God and be a part of what God is doing with those elements.

And trust that when we do that, God is actually doing something with our trust.

It is on this foundation that we heard 3 inspiring stories about how James, Liz, Doug and Nicole did something with God this summer. What I want us to do for a very short time is to nestle their ministries in the oldest story we heard, and that is the story of Abram.

It starts with Abram's nephew, getting taken as prisoner of war when he lived in Sodom. We forget that the great founders of our faith often lived in a state of war and chaos. I can feel that a little more strongly haven't just remembered the tragedy of 9/11. So, we can imagine what it must have been like for Abram to have heard: "Your nephew has been taken as prisoner of war."

Abram took 385 members of his own household to go rescue his relative. Make no mistake about it, this was a military incursion. Abram won Lot back and afterwards negotiated terms with his neighbor.

"After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:
Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

So the first thing Abram did was to deal with his fear. No doubt, he was still reeling from having to rescue his nephew, Lot.

I believe that is almost always the first thing we have to deal with when ever we choose to let the World Builder and World Creator organize the elements of creation the way God wants them to be organized.

Abram is an especially interesting example for us here in Northern Jersey because the first thing he did was to talk back to God:
Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is one of my slaves. You have given me no children in spite of your promise to bless the entire earth through my offspring and by giving me land.

God started it. Abram didn't start out saying "I know, I'll suggest to God that I become the instrument for blessing the world through a unique country that would download God's standards of living and demonstrate God's kingdom to everyone else." No! Abram was minding his own business in Ur of the Caldees when God commanded Abram to be our patriarch.

That's the second thing we all know about doing things with God. God initiates, we are called to participate. This helps with something called "fixation."

There is a kind of faithfulness and tenacity that responds to disappointment and set back with trust. You don't give up, but you have the grace to let go of the results you thought you needed and keep going with God. That's what Abram and Sarai did. There is something very close to their faithfulness, but a distortion of it, and that is fixation. You can tell when you have become fixated when you just can't let go of something, and you feel the need to control what other people are doing rather than your own behavior. Also, fixation always feels frantic and forced. Whereas faithfulness has a spaciousness to it that is content to wait on God's timing.

The good news for us for today is this, God kept showing up for Abram and Sarai even after they gave into their fixations and tried to bless the world with their own schemes for creating offspring. You may remember that Sarai gave one of her female slaves to Abram and said “have a baby with her, God is obviously not keeping God’s promises through me.” In spite of this, God did come back to them, restating God’s original promise and Isaac was born to them after many years of being barren and landless. Eventually, long after Abram and Sarai passed away, Isaac did become the next patriarch.

Let’s look now at how Abram’s story is a template for how we and God get things done together.

First, there is the element of fear. It’s just part of our life and especially when ever we set out to do something. We are often busy, but you know there is a difference between being busy and really doing something. Liz, Doug, Nicole and James would all agree with Abram and Sarai – don’t let the fear stop you from jumping on board when God calls you. If you do, you will miss out.

Second, what do we do when our vision for what God is doing turns out to be very different from what actually happens? We may well respond like Abram and Sarai did – fixating on things that are not ours to control. When we do that, it doesn’t have to be the end. God is big enough to come to us and restate God’s promise and let us bear fruit the way Sarai and Abram did.

I can’t help but think of Nicole’s friend who thought she was going to serve people by getting their most basic needs met. Ice is nice, but it isn’t needed to survive. But in a mission changing moment she let God touch her by noticing something very raw and powerful in a person right next to her. And now, Nicole is wearing an ice cube tattoo and telling us about her friend’s faithfulness. So, not only did her faithfulness bear fruit for people who got cool water to drink, but it is also bearing fruit right now, inspiring us to stay connected to what is actually happening rather than what we think should be happening.

That kind of pivot is only possible when your trust in God goes deeper than your vision of God’s mission or your image of who you think God created you to be.

There is a lot of vulnerability and human rawness in all of these stories today. And underneath them all, there is our God waiting to bring us into God’s world creating energy.

- Following God in spite of fear
- Having the trust to pivot when God’s leadings and the reality around us don’t match our fixations
- Letting God carry us past our fixations back into God’s project.

These are things God’s Spirit does for us each and every day. It helps to know these stories of how God and we get things done together. I hope they inspire you to let go when you need to, to be grace filled and spacious when you need to, and to keep saying yes to God even when you know you said no to God and are coming back. Because our children, our world, our neighbors and our culture need us to follow the examples we see in all 4 of the stories today.