Tedd Pullano

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In this morning’s passage, we meet Abraham and Sarah as they have answered God’s call “to go”, but as they are waiting for the answer to God’s promise that they will be parents to a vast generation of people.

Genesis 18:1-15

*18The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. 2He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. 3He said, ‘My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. 4Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.’ So they said, ‘Do as you have said.’ 6And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, ‘Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.’ 7Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 8Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.*

*9They said to him, ‘Where is your wife Sarah?’ And he said, ‘There, in the tent.’ 10Then one said, ‘I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. 11Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 12So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?’ 13The Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” 14Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.’ 15But Sarah denied, saying, ‘I did not laugh’; for she was afraid. He said, ‘Oh yes, you did laugh.’*

***Hospitality***

This week my family watched a 3-part series on ESPN about the basketball rivalry between the Los Angeles Lakers and my beloved Boston Celtics. It was fascinating and informative – particularly the stuff about the Celtics. It’s always great to hear good things about your favorite team – especially when they are winning. While a majority of the series was about the basketball rivalry, there was a surprising amount about some of the social issues going on during this rivalry. In particular, there was much in the series about the racial tensions going on in both Los Angeles and Boston – and interestingly those tensions were around in the 60’s, 70’s, 80’s, 90’s, into the new century. Listening to what was said, it was clear that the racial tensions were quite high then. In discussing these racial issues, they showed this photograph taken in Boston during the bussing riots (slide 1). Up until Tuesday night, I had never seen this photo. And now I wish I hadn’t. That photograph right there is a haunting, disturbing photograph. To me it shows the aggressive, hate-filled anger of racial division. A question for me in thinking about this was “how can one person hate another person so much –particularly a stranger?”

But, luckily for us as a nation, we are past all that, right? No, no we are not – not by a long shot. As a matter of personal opinion, it seems about the same now as then. And race is certainly not the only area in our culture with this anger and division. Just look at the current state of politics. That’s so divisive and vicious. (newspaper article from Saturday) There are also class issues which do not seem to be getting any better. It baffles me that while we have made much technological progress in the last 50 years, and we are so proud that we can do so many incredible things with machinery and computers, yet we have made little progress in the area of our lives that matters the most: **human relations**. We are still unable to treat everyone with the love and respect each person deserves – even if we disagree with them. Perhaps I am just too sensitive to it, but all the hatred and vitriol going on in our nation has become overwhelming and oppressive to me. Our government’s leaders, on both sides of the aisle, are setting an atrocious example of how we should treat each other. Again, I am not choosing sides here – there is plenty of blame to go around. The investigative hearings going on are so angry; the tweets are inexcusably offensive. There is a biased media who seem try and try and try to report things in order to get a rise out of people; and who ask biased, nasty, anger oriented questions.

There is a significant division in this country and no one, I mean no one, is really doing anything to bridge that gap; no one is working to bring healing and reconciliation. And so many of us, myself included, walk through our days “out of sorts”, hurting, oppressed by the vicious words and attitudes portrayed by too many people. I have had several conversations with people this week about how troubling this all is. Sisters and brothers, it must stop. There must be healing and reconciliation. We need healing and reconciliation. We are human begins – we are all the same. As Mother Teresa said “we have forgotten that we belong to one another.” We must learn – relearn? – how to treat each other better and begin to treat each other better. “But how”, you ask? Great question.

Well, how about this for one step in a solution – what would happen if we followed Abraham and Sarah’s example? What would happen if we followed their lead based on the first 8 verses in today’s passage? Look at it with me. Look at the way Abraham and Sarah treated these total strangers they had never met before and they knew nothing about. It was a fairly dangerous time they lived in. These *“three men”* as the text tells us could have been bandits or murderers or rapists or worse. But look at the way our heroes treated them: **like Kings**. Abraham could not offer hospitality and caring and compassion fast enough. Look at verse 2 (slide 2) – as soon as Abraham saw them he ran to meet them and bowed down to them. In the middle of a hot day this nearly 100 year old man ran to meet these strangers – and then, instead of pulling a weapon to protect himself or attack them verbally, he put himself at their total mercy and showed them respect and honor – even at the expense of his own pride and honor. He put these folks first – no questions asked. That is an example for all of us to follow in attempting to create a whole, healed world: putting others first, offering respect as our primary response.

And then his and Sarah’s hospitality, caring, compassion only get better from there. The next thing Abraham does it to wash their feet (remind of another scene of foot washing?); that’s a disgusting and awful task – but one of immense kindness. Again, a classic, small task that shows us how to treat others. Then Abraham and Sarah feed the men – and look at the way they did so. There was great urgency in their actions – the text tells us that Abraham “hastened” to get to Sarah, that he “ran” again to get the calf, that Sarah was to work “quickly”, and that Abraham again “hastened” to have the calf prepared. That’s fantastic – these two folks had this incredible sense of urgency and deeply valued hospitality – hospitality that was efficient and valued the time of those who were being served. I love that attitude – the servant attitude through which these two children of God honored their strangers. And they spared no expense as they served a calf “tender and good” as the text tells us. Again, their hearts were full of caring and kindness. They gave these men their all. I believe that’s how we are called to treat people. That’s how we build relationships and create healing and reconciliation – by treating others, regardless of how they vote or what they look like or how much money they have, **as better than you.** By being their servant.

Yes, that’s radical. Yes that’s difficult. Yes, it may even be painful. But I believe that is the way we are called to live as followers, disciples, of Jesus the Christ. Being a disciple means being hospitable and kind and caring like our ancestors in the faith Abraham and Sarah. Being a disciple means, I believe, putting others before us. It means using kind and encouraging words when we are with people – even people we disagree with. It means sometimes ceding control to those around us. It means putting others first. And in order to do so, we must be incredibly trusting of God to keep us safe and fulfilled and strong. That's a lot of trust. But the behavior of servant hospitality is essential and vital for these days we are living in if we are to bring the healing and reconciliation the world needs.

Sisters and brothers, the world’s behavior must change – we cannot continue like we are – it is too painful for all of us. And we, the Church of Jesus Christ, must be out front leading the change. We need to be above reproach in our behavior and treatment of those we encounter. We need to treat others, strangers, friends, family, as Abraham and Sarah did: with incredible hospitality and kindness. Yes, I know it’s not easy. But when we are connected to God, when we are in communion with God, when we know how deeply we are loved by God, we are well on the way to living out this call to radical servant hospitality.

This year 50th anniversary of the Confession of 1967. The Confession of 1967 was a statement by the Presbyterian Church about the world/United States and how our faith needed to engage the situations in the US at that time. Here a few of the words from it – and see how it could have been written today.

**The Confession of 1967 addresses the church’s role in the modern world. It calls the church to obedient action, particularly in response to social problems such as racial discrimination, nationalistic arrogance, and family and class conflict. It sees the life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ as the pattern for the church’s mission today, and calls on all Christians to be reconciled to God and to one another.**

**“In Jesus Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. Jesus Christ is God with man. He is the eternal Son of the Father, who became man and lived among us to fulfill the work of reconciliation. He is present in the church by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue and complete his mission. This work of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the foundation of all confessional statements about God, people, and the world. Therefore, the church calls all people to be reconciled to God and to one another. God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which he has called his church are the heart of the gospel in any age.**

**To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as God’s reconciling community. This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God’s message of reconciliation and shares God’s labor of healing the enmities which separate people from God and from each other. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church maintains continuity with the apostles and with Israel by faithful obedience to his call.**

**Our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ.”**

We are that generation. As Jesus’ Christ’s disciples, this is our call. It is up to us to bring reconciliation and healing the world – by our actions, our words, our example. With God’s power and grace and strength, let us be ever faithful to this call.