

God of Declaration

Relational God: Part 2 “God of Declaration”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – January 29, 2023

4th Sunday after Epiphany

Readings: Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22; John 1:10-13

Reflection: Psalm 105

Greeting: The Lord is merciful and compassionate. The Lord is very patient, and full of faithful love. The Lord is good to everyone and everything. God’s compassion extends to all his handiwork! (*Psalm 145:8-9*)

Prayer: Lord, our guide and our guardian, we pray that you will shelter us and lead us as we join together today in worship. May we remember the wonders of your creation each and every day. May we remember that we are a people of your great promise. May we recall your steadfast love that has been revealed to us. May we know that you are with us in all things old and new, and that you are there in every transition. We pray that you help us to face any change with faith and perseverance because you are with us. May we worship you in spirit and truth this hour, and may we proclaim the love of our savior is for all people. And it is in Jesus’ name we pray this day. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 105

O give thanks to the Lord; call on his name; make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually. Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles and the judgments he has uttered, O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones. He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.” (Psalm 105:1-11 NRSV)*

We read the words of the 105th Psalm and we hear of God’s glory. We also hear of Abraham, God’s chosen. We hear of the promise of an everlasting covenant. That God cares for his people. How does it help you to think about God’s presence in your life? Do you share in the ways in which the Lord has blessed you? How does God’s love change your life? How do you let that love reach out to others? How has your life changed because of God? How can we help others to experience the joy of Christ in their lives?

Prayer: O God, help us to remember all that you are for us. May we always celebrate your steadfast love in all the ways that we experience it. May you bless us in your love and your peace so that we may share that love and peace with others. Help us to show love to each other as a sign of our love for you. May we show the compassion and mercy that has been shown to us through Christ our Lord. As we reach out to you with our joys and our concerns, may you build us up in your mercy and grace. May you lift us up in both laughter and tears that we may always find comfort in you. And may you strengthen us in our celebrations and our sorrows, knowing that you are with us always. And it is in Jesus name that we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Genesis chapter 17 verses 1 through 8 and 15 through 22.

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding, and I will be their God." God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her and also give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!" God said, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.
(Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22 NRSV*)*

Our other reading for today comes from John chapter 1 verses 10 through 13.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who

believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. John 1:10-13 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We continue our current series with this week's look at Abraham and Sarah as we look at the God of Declaration. Although, to be clear, we begin this week with Abram and Sarai. I make that distinction because we see a change because of God's declaration in our reading from Genesis. I thought about this when I was thinking about the transfiguration because in it we see a change in Christ's appearance amongst all the other things that are going on. And it reminded me of this change with Abram and Sarai. But it also reminded me of the promise declared in our reading today. The connection we make is that this is the story of the Israelites, the people that Christ comes to deliver his message to. When we look at our reading, we have a couple who has grown quite old. Abram is 99 years old when our narrative begins, and Abram gets a visit from God. God declares that he has great things in store for Abram. That he will be the ancestor of a multitude of nations and that because of this, he will no longer be Abram. He is being changed, and God declares that he shall now be Abraham because God has made him the father of many nations. And God makes his covenant with Abraham, between him and his offspring yet to come. That the people of Abraham will be his people, and he will be their God. But that's not the end of this declaration because Sarai will no longer be Sarai, but she will be Sarah. And God will bless Abraham and Sarah by giving them a son and many people shall come from her. Abraham's responses to laugh. And you know, I cannot blame Abraham one bit for this because he sees the absurdity of this idea that a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman are going to have a child. He can't understand how that could be, so he asks that Ishmael might be the one that God chooses. God says that Sarah will have a son and he will be named Isaac. And one way to translate the name Isaac is "he will laugh." Isaac is named after Abraham's reaction. But Ishmael is not forgotten. Ishmael is to be blessed and he will be exceedingly numerous and be a great nation. But the promise God declares is to Isaac and his descendants.

Part of why I wanted to talk about this as we are moving towards the transfiguration is because we see God declaring his promise to Abraham that his descendants will be his people and he will be with them always. That they are expected to follow and listen to God. They shall be his people and he shall be their God. And it is people of this promise that we see in the transfiguration, and we will address them in the coming weeks. That we see Moses and Elijah, and we see a transfigured Christ. We see the people of this covenant that God's people will be fruitful and that many nations will come from them. And it will change the world. God declares it to be, and it is. God declares that Abram is no longer Abram but Abraham. God declares that Sarai is no longer Sarai but Sarah. And we see this but there's something else going on here. We might look at this and think these are going to be the only people ever that God blesses. And that's why I included the part of John we have this week. Because John opens up another path to us. Last week we started with the Word, and now we hear that "He was in the world,

and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” Reading this, it reminded me of when John the Baptist said that God could raise up children of Abraham from the stones around him. It also reminded me of the way that the gentiles were welcomed in by Paul. That they were not of the old covenant but that they were welcomed into God’s love all the same. That God had declared something new in Christ. Christ invites people in, and they are children of God. Children of God’s promise.

Though Abraham and his descendants are chosen to be God's people, that's not a limitation on who God can choose. And that's an important distinction for us to understand. Because when the Gentiles are invited in, when Paul goes out and says they can be part of this new promise, that it is a change from what the Israelites knew. They are invited in to become part of that new declaration to be God's people. I think it's important because sometimes we get too hung up on ideas without any idea of change happening. We can get caught up in trying to decide who God’s people are and who God’s people aren’t based on our own rules. That God’s chosen people had to chose to follow God. But God isn’t limited in being able to find new people that he can include in his promise. Because God is never limited. Because whatever God declares God can do. And sometimes we want to put up barriers. We want to set up rules for God to follow so that God plays by our rules. And the problem that we run into is that it means that we are dictating to God who God is supposed to help. We are trying to dictate who God is supposed to be. We want to declare who God is supposed to love and who God is supposed to reject. The problem is that when we decide to box God in the only person that we are boxing is ourselves. We are then putting up barriers to God's love. Because the way I see it is that if God has chosen me, if God has allowed me to follow him, then I will follow him. I don’t want to try to keep others away from God. But I will ask questions if I see those following God trying to keep others out. If somebody wants to follow God without loving their neighbor, then I’m going to ask how they can love God without loving one another. If somebody wants to try to claim God yet intentionally hurt their neighbor, I’m going to raise questions about how we can love God while hurting someone God loves.

Because if I have learned anything from Abraham, it's that God can choose who God chooses. Because God comes to Abraham and Abraham laughs. Yet God still chooses him because God still loves him. And God even names his child after that laughter. For me, all this comes down to knowing that God is God. Whatever God declares, it is not for me to demand that God follow my rules. It is there for me to follow God. It is there for me to understand how I can love the people that God has chosen. I have to figure out how I can love the people that God loves and how I can help the people that God wants me to help. That I can reach out to the least and the last, those whom society has pushed to the sides. If God has welcomed them in and loves them, then I need to figure out how I can welcome them and love them. Because if

I have learned anything about God, it is that God isn't about to play by my rules and hate who I hate. God won't be put on a human leash and led around. Because God's love is from everlasting to everlasting, a steadfast love that endures forever. It is up to me to decide if I will walk in that love and be changed by it. It is up to me to decide that I will hear all that God has declared and will declare, so that we know that God is with us. From this day forth, and forevermore. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Relational God

Our current series takes inspiration from the story of the Transfiguration. Each week we look at a different relational aspect of God and move through the first chapter of John. We look at Abraham, Moses, and Elijah and finish with the story of the Transfiguration of Christ.

January 22nd – *God of Creation* – Genesis 1:1-2:3; John 1:1-5

January 29th – *God of Declaration* – Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22; John 1:10-13

February 5th – *God of Revelation* – Exodus 33:12-23, 34:4-9, 27-29; John 1:14, 16-18

February 12th – *God of Transition* – 2 Kings 2:1-14; John 1:6-9, 19-21

February 19th – *God of Transformation* – Matthew 17:1-9; John 1:29-34

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr
Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks
Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz	Donna Carlen
Ernie Peters	Jess shoot	Alberta Darling	Family of Janet Dixon
Stanley Kiser	Family of Kyle Lehman	Corrine Howard	Stacy Janes
Family of Ann Pennington	Don Gilmore	Griffin Neidigh	Shirley Jester
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Nick & Leana Ochoa	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Kristen & Zach Morecraft	Greg Williams
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins
Janet Freeman			

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

* Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.