

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Summer Series - Abraham and Sarah - Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22

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### **Genesis 17:1-8, 15-22**

*17When 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. <sup>2</sup>And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." <sup>3</sup>Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,<sup>4</sup>"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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."*

*<sup>15</sup>God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup>I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." <sup>17</sup>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?"<sup>18</sup>And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!"<sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." <sup>22</sup>And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.*

Today we continue our sermon series "People of Faith – God's Story." God has given us the Bible so that we might know God's story and the story of God's people woven together. And as we discover these Biblical stories, we find our own stories within them as well.

In your bulletin today there is a short handout. Please take one home and reflect on the questions or ask your own questions. Open up your Bible and dig deeper into these stories of people of faith and look for ways their lives connect with yours.

Today we are going to meet Abram and Sarai known to us more often as Abraham and Sarah. In our reading from Genesis today we witness the moment where Abram and Sarai are given new names by God.

Names, we know, are important and significant. But what about new names? Have you ever been given a new name? Maybe a nick-name or a title or a legal name change?

Sometimes people choose to change their name, for all kinds of reasons. Or sometimes we are called by names others have given us that just stick. New names are given at birth or adoption. Sometimes names are changed with marriage, education or employment or a promotion.

When we are given a new name we might also be given a new identity, a new chapter maybe even a new life.

For Abram and Sarai the story of their name change comes after they have left home and followed God's call. And in Genesis 17 God speaks to Abram and tells him that he will now be called Abraham. And his wife Sarai will be called Sarah.

God has made an everlasting covenant with them. Promising that they will be the beginning of a great family, a multitude of nations. God's covenant, God says, will last throughout the lifetimes of all their descendants.

Throughout the Bible we find stories of God's covenants with God's people. People like Abraham, Sarah, Moses and Noah.

Covenants that God makes between God and God's people are not like any kind of legal contract we might understand between two equal parties. These covenants are initiated and fulfilled by God. They are a sign of God's commitment and God's relationship with God's people. They are a promise from God that will never be broken.

Now if we go back to Genesis 12 we learn that when Abram was seventy-five God called him to leave his home in Haran for a new land promising Abram that God will make a great nation from him. And so Abram and Sarai left their home to follow God's call.

Imagine being called to begin a new life in a new land at the age of seventy-five. Maybe you don't have to imagine this because you have lived it. Whether we are five or twenty-five or fifty-five or seventy-five God calls us to unexpected places and people, experiences and vocations. Maybe you have something in common with Abraham and Sarah that you never thought about before.

Well at the age of seventy-five and sixty-six, Abram and Sarai heard God's call and followed.

Time passed and Abram wondered how God's promises would be fulfilled since he has no children. In Genesis 15 God again promises Abram that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. An incredible promise to imagine for any of us who have seen a sky full of stars. And still Abram both wondered about and believed God's promise.

And in our story today in Genesis 17 when Abram is 99 years old and Sarai is 90 God makes a covenant with Abram and Sarai that will be everlasting. God appeared to Abram and said "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."

With God's promise comes a new name for both Abram and Sarai. Abram, which means exalted father, becomes Abraham which means father of multitudes. Sarai, which means noble woman, becomes Sarah which means princess. Their names were each multiplied in meaning.

This name change marked Abraham and Sarah's new role and new life in this covenant relationship with God. With God's covenant and God's promise, comes God's naming and blessing. God claims Abraham and Sarah and all of their descendants as God's own people. And they are given a new name for a new life.

After explaining to Abraham that circumcision will be the sign of this covenant (in verses 9-14) God promises that Sarai will have a son saying "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. If you have ever only pictured Abraham as a serious, obedient, elderly man picture him now.

God speaks. God appears before Abraham and speaks. And Abraham listens and then laughs. He cannot begin to understand how God will do what God has promised.

Have you ever done the same thing? Laughed at the idea that God's promises are for you? Laughed at the thought that your life might be different tomorrow than it is today?

I hope you have laughed at God and will laugh. I hope you have wondered about God and will wonder. I hope you have been angry with God and share your anger. I hope you have been surprised by God and will be surprised. Because the life of faith includes all that and more. It is a life lived in relationship with God that we are invited to be a part of every day.

Today we see an example of the life of faith in Abraham and Sarah. They show us what faithfulness is. They followed God into a new place not knowing where they would end up. They held on to God's promises. They wondered how those promises would come to be real for them. They laughed at God when they couldn't believe and found joy when God's promises were fulfilled.

In our life of faith we should expect no less than Abraham and Sarah. We are called to the unknown. We live through difficult and wonderful times. We are surprised by God, skeptical of God, comforted by God and surrounded by God always.

As Christians we trace our story of faith back to Abraham, back to the covenant, back to God's claiming and naming and love for God's people.

You and I live out this covenant relationship with God today. And we too have been given a new name. You are called Child of God and have been claimed and named in your baptism with God's love and God's promises.

By this new name we are claimed as God's own people, God's own children. And we are brought into a new relationship, a new covenant and a new life with God.

Child of God is the most important name we have. The most important name to remember. Beyond all the others names we carry – whether that be the name we were given at birth or a nick-name, title or label we carry now – the name Child of God is the name that marks us for who we truly are.

Whether you are 99 or 9 years old today God knows you and calls you by name, promising you are my own, my child. This new name is the one we have been given to remember and carry each and every day. It is the name God never forgets. By God's promise and this new name, God marks and claims us as God's own.

That's something to carry with you as you leave worship today, as you go out into a world that wants to give you so many other names. Today you have been given a new name for a new life.

So today remember and know that you are a loved child of God. A child of the covenant. God gives you new life this day with this new name. Like Abraham and Sarah, may it lead you on an amazing new journey.

Amen.