

Sunday December 1, 2019
Lesson 1: Trusting With Hope
Scripture: Genesis 12: 1-9

Context:

The first lesson for this new season is called “Trusting With Hope.” For the month of December, we will look at the word “hope” and see how that word guides our faith journey. How appropriate as we begin the season of Advent that we look at this word and think about how our God brings us hope in all seasons of our lives.

The first lesson of hope starts in the beginning of Genesis with the story of Abraham. However, early in his narrative, he is Abram. Abram and his wife Sarai have not been able to have children up until this point in his narrative. They are in their homeland where they know the land and Abram’s family.

Yet God speaks to Abram that it is time for him to move with his family. They are to go to a new land where God will make them into a great nation. Through Abraham will come many blessings to all those around them and for the future of the nations. These are the words that Abram hears from God.

This call Abram receives is the first of his narrative in which he will receive a promise from God. Even though the promise is something that is new and foreign, it is one of the only things offered to him in a seemingly hopeless situation. Throughout the Abrahamic narrative is the seeming contradiction: to stay in safety is to remain barren; to leave in risk is to have hope.¹ Abram has not been to this land, yet God calls him to pack his family and go to this faraway place to establish roots.

Yet even in this scripture passage, the ending does not conclude with a “and they lived happily ever after.” When Abram and his family arrive in the land of Canaan, they discover that other people reside there. The land that God has promised them does not include a hospitality committee or have vacant signs all around. The Canaanites are firmly rooted and it does not look like they will leave any time soon.

Although God has kept the promise to bring Abram to a new land, there are still realities to contend with as they settle down. First, Abram must be a minority in a new land with people he has never met and people who are not part of his tribe.² Secondly, Abram must learn to live in relationship with the Canaanites and figure out how to be with them, yet stand apart.³ His God asks different things of him than the Canaanite gods demand of the Canaanites. He must trust that God will show him the way in this new land.

Application

If you have ever had to move, you can probably empathize with the story of

¹ Walter Brueggemann, “Genesis,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 2010), 118.

² *Ibid.*, 123.

³ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

Abram. Whether for good reasons or bad reasons, a move can be a scary thing to do with so many uncertainties that float before you. Will you like the new place you live? What will the people be like? How quickly will you feel at home compared to other places?

In this case, Abram does not have any of those questions answered. All he knows is that God has made him a promise that will come over time. When he arrives at this new place, the promise seems even more insecure as Abram notices that he has company. In addition to living among the Canaanites, he must contend with their different practices. They worship different gods and have different traditions. Yet the promise looms over Abram that God will use him to be a blessing through his family and wherever he lives.

Many of us might understand Abram in our journeys as we think of all the places that God calls and leads us. Beyond moving, there may be places God calls us that makes us uncomfortable at first. We may find ourselves in the work world where secular practices clash with our religious convictions. There are friendships we have where people are extremely different from us in belief and practice. Even within our homes, there are variations between individuals who have different life experiences due to age and perspectives. We have to live in a world that is always in some type of chaos.

And yet we are called to be a people of hope, called to trust even when we cannot see the end result of where our journey may lead us. Like Abram, we are called to go maybe not seeing the end results of God's promises to us in sight. It is counter cultural to the world we live in. As Americans, we are taught to control our destiny and to pave our way, making our own paths with whatever it takes for us to achieve. Yet the biblical narrative calls us to a new way of being.

Being a people of hope does not mean we will have all the answers or know all the parts of our journey beforehand. Yet being a people of hope does mean that we trust that God will show us the way and be with us on our journey. In the secular work world, we can learn to translate our religious convictions into a way in which we do the right thing and work beside others. For relationships with those different than us, we can learn to appreciate the differences we have with our friends and celebrate the similarities. The homes we live in can be ways where we learn from those who offer varying perspectives or life experiences.

As we begin the season of Advent today, we remember that it is a season where we celebrate hope. We have hope that God will lead us in the direction that we need to go and hope that God's ways are bigger than the dreams we could ever imagine. We hope that we will make room in our hearts for the coming of the Christ child. During this season, we remember that our hope does not come in the powers of the world, but in an infant who was born in a rural community in the open air surrounded by animals.

Let us always remember the hope that we have in Jesus Christ and the promise made to us that God will be with us on our journey. May we learn to trust even when we cannot see and know that God's promise is enough. Like Abram, let us grow to be a people of hope.

What was a time when hope carried you through a changing season? How do you define "hope"? Where was a place where you leaned to trust God? Why do you think it is important we place our hope in God over the powers of the world? How can you share hope with those who are different from you?

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