

**Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**June 15, 2008**

**Proper 6 A - 2008**

In the Name of our One Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In today's lesson from the Book of Genesis, we continue the story of last week's couple, Abram and Sarai. They are old now and things haven't been working out for them as they had planned. They had been promised a land and countless descendants. Sarai still hadn't had children, so they decided to try it another way – and Sarai sent in the slave girl Hagar to Abram to obtain a child from her. Taking a slave's child from her is a dubious moral compromise and we'll see that it did not work out very well. It wasn't what God had in mind. God again appeared to Abram and entered into covenant with him, again promising a son by 99 year old Sarai – now to be called Sarah as he is to be called Abraham.

So here we find them in that most difficult of places – the present. They are living in a tent and are very old and still without the heir God has promised. The future looks bleak and looking back, they may well have had many regrets about leaving their home. The Lord again appears in the form of three visitors and Abraham greets them with the hospitality expected to be extended in the desert. The visitors ask after Sarah and one says he will return and that Sarah will by then have had a son. Sarah laughs – no fool she, after all she's old and it ceased to be with her “after the manner of women” and as for Abraham, he was, well, a hundred years old. When the visitor challenges her laughter, she denies it out of fear. Fear of what? Fear of

admitting that they had given up on living life because they were convinced they had no future?

The response of the Lord to Abraham to Sarah's derisive laughter is one of the great truths of the Bible and one of the great challenges to humanity: "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" It is God's call to us in the present – the call to faith – to trust in the present moment, the One who is providing all the possibilities in the as yet unknown future.

Life looked pretty bleak, too, in the time of Jesus. The land was occupied by the brutal Roman Empire. The people were poor and oppressed – by a corrupt local king and by a corrupt Temple system, both of whom extracted onerous taxes. Justice was the exception not the rule. It was enough to make one give up on life. But there was a young rabbi that was creating a buzz and had developed a following, including not a few who followed him about. This man, Jesus, went about proclaiming that things didn't have to be this way and that God wanted a better life for God's people. He went to the people and proclaimed the good news and healed every disease and sickness. Matthew tells us that when he saw the crowds, the enormous needs of the people, he felt compassion for them "because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd."

So Jesus sends out the twelve. He gives them their mission statement: "Proclaim the good news, 'the kingdom of heaven has come near.'" How? By doing what Jesus has already done: curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and casting out demons.

Jesus told them that they'd meet opposition. Not everyone had experienced the new teachings and faith of Jesus and taken the time to bring that experience into their

own lives. When you hear something for the first time, one is apt to be skeptical and one's reaction may well be negative. It takes courage to allow something new and unfamiliar to sit with you long enough to really grasp it. Don't be discouraged, be patient. But there are people who will not be open to anything new or the possibility that things could be different. In that case, move on and shake the dust of that negative place from your own shoes.

William James said that one of the great discoveries of his generation was that by changing our attitudes we can change our lives. Yes, we have to think things through and be sensible, but truth be told, if we limit all possibility to only what is known this moment then nothing will change – especially ourselves. We have to adopt an attitude of possibilities of opportunities and benefits. It is an attitude of faith that allows us to see the present moment more clearly. It is faith that allows us not to be bound by the facts as seen yesterday or by the fears of what tomorrow could bring. It is faith that lets us get ahead of yesterday and not be paralyzed by fear.

Genesis tells us that God sets the agenda and gives us the possibilities. Jesus says the same thing – “Tell them the good news – that the kingdom of heaven has come near.” In other words, don't be waiting longingly or fearfully for the future or be stuck with what you knew yesterday. God is right here in the present moment if only we had trust enough to see that.

I am sure the twelve shook a lot of dust from their sandals. But enough of their message stuck to change the world. We are still at it. There are still many people who have a hard time acknowledging that the Creative Power of God is only available to us in the present moment. Some prefer to live entirely with the certainties of yesterday. Others are entirely either fearful of or preoccupied by the future. Church is at its best

when it challenges and leads the society and culture it exists in to see the realities and possibilities of the present because that is where God works.

Jesus challenged his world to get attitude – an attitude of faith and trust that allows us to see the good God wants for us. Before we can take that out into the world we have to do the work ourselves. We have to live in the present in our own lives and as a community. Jesus acknowledges that it will provoke fear, distrust and even violent opposition. However it is the only place where the power of God's healing, cleansing and enlivening can occur.