

“Giving Up Expectations” - Genesis 12:1-4a; John 3:1-17 – Rev. Jeff Childs

There often is a problem with expectations. They tend to either be too high or too low. It seems to be that we tend to forget what I call the **Goldilocks Principle**. You remember her from the fairy tale trying out the bowls of porridge, the chairs and the beds and discovering some were too this and others were too that, but the last one was always “Just right!” When it comes to expectations, we tend to miss the “just right” and aim either too high or too low. Sometimes Low Expectations can become “self fulfilling prophecies.” We might think, “We cannot beat that team, they are too good,” and we lose before the game even begins. Or we say, “I can’t possibly do that,” and we don’t even try, and thus we fulfil what we expected and predicted. There are times when we might even say, “Oh, it can’t possibly get any worse,” and yet sometimes we discover – Oh, yes it can!

On the flip side, sometimes we have very high expectations. I’m thinking that Nicodemus did. He came to Jesus to learn something. He was troubled with what Jesus had been saying and wanted Jesus to explain it plainly and simply answer his questions. But, here in this story, what Nicodemus received was more questions instead of simple answers. Perhaps he expected with this “one on one” time at night alone with Jesus he could get his deepest questions answered. But in the conversation, we find he is more confused about being born anew, or born of the Spirit, or born into God’s kingdom. Here we have the **Holy Spirit Principle** – Jesus teaches Nicodemus, and the rest, of us that the Holy Spirit blows where it will. We might want to harness it and control the Spirit, but the truth is - it is the other way around. We are to yield to and be moved by the Spirit. I was reminded of an old adage from sail boating – “We cannot change the wind direction, but we can adjust the sail.” And if that truly is the case, then really the only thing we can expect is the unexpected and adjust to it.

I see in the other scripture today a way to live if we give up expectations - Walk by Faith. Abraham and Sarah followed God's call to leave their homeland and travel to the place God promised their descendants, even though they didn't know how it would all work out. Perhaps it was best that they didn't know of slavery in Egypt or wandering in the wilderness, exile to Babylon, Nazi concentration camps, etc. for the people of Israel. Abraham and Sarah trusted God and started off on a faith journey. How far might you walk by faith? Do you just walk for yourself or for future generations? Abraham and Sarah walked for their descendents. How far will you go to help your children or grandchildren be established in their faith? I have been amazed to watch the refugees fleeing their war-torn homelands seeking a better life for their children. Next Sunday we will be asking you to open up your wallets to make a special “Love Offering” to help UMCOR help the refugees and others in need around the world. God blessed Abraham and Sarah to be a blessing to others. Let us bless likewise by the way we live and love our neighbors in need today and every day.

When Nicodemus is talking to Jesus, he has a hard time understanding what God's amazing grace is really about because he is used to thinking in terms of religious rules and rituals and a reactive God. God would punish the bad and reward the good. He and the people of his day understood God as a judgmental God. When people sinned God

demanded a sacrifice, usually that meant an animal had to die. Maybe he saw or heard something from Jesus that caused him to think there was something else. Sometimes we just can't know what's going on or what's coming next. The Spirit led Nicodemus to Jesus. I believe the Spirit led you here to church to learn from Jesus. Jesus offered Nicodemus a "do over." The invitation was to be born anew, to live a new life not following the old ways but yielding to the nudge of the Holy Spirit. Friends, that invitation is for us today, too.

The poet Robert Burns wrote, "The best-laid plans of mice and men oft(en) go astray." God doesn't guarantee any future circumstances or uninterrupted prosperity, but we can trust that God will be with us through whatever circumstances we face, and that God will work with us to make the best result out of even the most hopeless of places. God will work in spite of our plans! (Let those who have ears, listen.) Abraham, Sarah and Nicodemus got way more than they ever could have expected. How about you?

Today I invite us to give up our expectations, so that we can take up God's expectations for us! God expected Abraham and Sarah to go where God led them. God expected Nicodemus to go find Jesus and learn from him that God so loves the world. More than that, did you notice in John 3:16 & 17, God sent Jesus not to judge and condemn us, but to forgive and save us. Will you yield to God's plan? Will you let go of your own expectations and rise to God's expectation? Will you give up your expectations and simply walk by faith? Alleluia and Amen.

During Lent this week, use these questions in a "Soul to soul" conversation with people.

When you have expectations, are they usually too high or too low? Give an example.

How would you explain being "born anew?" When have you experienced it?

How might you give up your expectations and take up God's expectation for you?

Like Abraham and Sarah, how might you be a blessing to others this week?

Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12)

Jeffrey B. Childs 3/10/25

Abraham and Sarah,
Left their old homeland,
God revealed what God saw,
That for them God had planned.

For the world they would be,
Both blessed and become blessings,
As a faithful family,
From them would come kings.

God's will for them was done,
When they left and journeyed on.
A new life was now begun,
As God they relied upon.

What if to God we said, "Yes."
And followed God today?
How might God our world bless,
If our God we obey?