



'Counting Stars'

Second Sunday in Lent
5:30 p.m. Saturday, February 20, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Luke 13:31-35

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come.
Amen.

We held one of our "Milestone" sessions this morning. We invited all those young folks who wanted to learn more about communion to come and talk with Kelly Falck, our Christian Ed for Pre-school to grade 5, and all three of the pastors. I think we had a good morning, but then again, I lead one of the discussions, so I'm biased. Still, I honestly think it went well.

One of the things we talked about in *my* session was the story in Luke's gospel about Jesus on the road to Emmaus after he rose from the dead. We talked about how, as Jesus walked and talked with the two people on the road, Jesus explained how he had fulfilled all of the things the prophets had said about him in scripture. I didn't realize until much later was that I never said God, indeed, always keeps the promises that God makes. Those promises don't always come about in the way, or the time, that **we** may want them to, but God does, indeed, always keep the promises that God makes.

In our lesson tonight, God made some promises to Abram & Sarai, and those promises didn't come to fruition quite as quickly, or in the manner, that Abram & Sarai had hoped. See, several years back from where our reading tonight picks up, all the way back to chapter 11 in Genesis, Abram & his people are living in the country of Ur. That's somewhere around modern day Kuwait, a bit northwest of the Persian Gulf. Abram's father, Terah, decides to move the entire entourage north. They end up in Haran, just across the modern Syrian border into Turkey. After Terah dies, an interesting thing happens: Lord God speaks to Abram and his wife Sarai, and tells them

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3 NRSV)

So off they go on this great adventure, Abram, Sarai, and their nephew Lot. Oh, one thing to remember, verse 11:30:

³⁰ Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. (Genesis 11:30 NRSV)

Did you also catch that *will make of you a great nation* bit? Yeah, remember that one.

We work our way through chapters 12, 13, & 14, we follow the various adventures, deceptions, acts of retribution, and worship that Abram, Sarai & Lot deal with. And we see, time and again, no matter what shenanigans they all get up to, Lord God is with them.

So bunches of stuff have transpired, until we get to Abram's, let's call it an *outburst*, that we heard in our reading tonight. Abram is upset, because he **still** does not have a biological heir, that beginning to a *great nation*. He assumes God is not going to fulfill this promise, and he will have to leave all his business to Eliezer, his right hand man, his main steward. Regardless of however much he might care for Eliezer, the thought of leaving all his hard work to one who is not his very own issue, bone of his bone or flesh of his flesh, that is to say, a *slave*, that thought is simply **not** sitting well with Abram. That is, until God gives him a theological dope slap up along the side of his head.

"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them."
Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." (Genesis 15:5 NRS)

God reminds Abram that God **always** keeps those promises that God makes. That's what I think God is getting at when God says "Count the stars."

You know, I think we all tend to forget that God keeps promises. Because we want God to do things in **our** time. We want God to answer us in the way **we** want an answer. I, personally, think, all of us, humans and God together, would just be so much better off if God would simply learn to text, or maybe even send a fax (I don't trust email for something like an answer from God; with my luck, something from the Almighty would get stuck in my spam filter). Last week, I talked about ways we can work at helping ourselves in times of temptation (Yes, I know, last week Pastor Easton was here & I preached at Contemporary). This week, we're faced with the question of how do we deal with *waiting* for God to answer us? How do we "count the stars"? I think, pretty much in the same ways that we fight temptation.

First, get to know scripture. Read your Bible. If all you have is a King James translation, while that is a beautiful book to read, it's kind of difficult to understand, because I don't know about most of you, but *Verily, I say until thee, I speaketh not in seventeenth century English*. Get something really easy to understand, like **The New Living Translation**, or **The Message**. Then read it. Daily.

You don't have to read the whole thing all at once. There stands a good chance there is a reading plan right there in your Bible. If not, reading plans are easy enough to find online; type "Bible reading plans" in Google, and look at all the stuff that comes up.

How else can we "count stars"? Be in worship. Regularly and frequently. It doesn't have to be at Trinity; it doesn't even necessarily have to be in a church (but I do think we worship better with others around us). But the more we worship, I think the easier it becomes to hear God; either in those around us, or in our own hearts.

And do stuff for others. Help those in need. It gets real easy these days to get so caught up in our own busy-ness, and I myself am way too guilty of that. We focus on ourselves, or the things and people that impact us directly, and forget about those that do not impact us. I do **not** mean to imply that it is bad or wrong to be concerned about our own, personal, well-being, or the well-being of those that impact our lives directly. What I am trying to say is that we all need to make time for those that do **not** impact us directly. When we do that, when our focus gets off of ourselves - no, let me say, when **my** focus gets off of **myself**, - I am better able to hear God.

We are in the season of Lent. Lent has long been a time to spend more time Building our faith, listening for God, "Counting stars", if you would. Let's all try to do that this year. Try to look beyond our own, busy lives, and help those in need. To reach out to someone we might not normally see, or talk with someone who simply needs an ear to hear. Count the stars in the heavens - *those* are the followers of God.

Amen.

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