

## SERMON GENESIS 17 WHAT DOES AGE HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

March 17, 2024

As I noted on the first Sunday of Lent, during my daily quiet time, I use four different devotionals from various authors and theological backgrounds. One of my readings last month was from the seventeenth chapter of the Book of Genesis where God promises Abraham that he will be the ancestor of many nations. At this time, Abraham was ninety-nine years old and his wife Sarah was ninety years old, and they had not been able to have children. Listen to God's promise to Abraham in the first seven verses and then in verses fifteen through sixteen of the seventeenth chapter of Genesis.

Read Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Abram was 99 years old when the Lord gave him the name "Abraham," meaning "father of nations." Sarah was ninety. They were painfully aware of their ages and the limitations that come with them. Yet God called and chose these two older adults and promised to make them not just fruitful, but "exceedingly fruitful." They saw their age as an obstacle, but God saw it as an opportunity.

With respect to age, many of us can relate to Abraham and Sarah. Bill Mason recently sent me an article on *Aging Gracefully*. Listen to some of the quotes from the article:

1. Old age comes at a bad time. (Ed Sullivan)
2. Inside every older person is a younger person wondering what happened. (Stevie Wonder)
3. The older I get, the better I used to be. (Lee Trevino)
4. Grandchildren don't make a man feel older, it's the knowledge that he's married to a grandmother that does. (Norman Vincent Peale)
5. At age 20, we worry about what others think about us; at age 40, we don't care what they think of us; at age 60, we discover they haven't been thinking about us at all. (Ann Landers)
6. At my age, flowers scare me. (George Burns)

One of the unfortunate facts in Christianity today is that most congregations are growing older with fewer young adults joining their membership. This is especially true in the Methodist Church. More than once, I have been asked what are we doing to attract younger members? Unfortunately, as churches, we are facing the consequences of our lack of evangelism over the years, focusing more on politics and fads instead of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the busy schedules of young families, and the influence of the devil in our society. While this may sound bleak, I'm not ready to throw in the towel. As I have said before I truly believe in the power of the Holy Spirit and nothing is impossible for God.

Despite the age of this and other congregations, we can still make a difference for the Lord here in Rio Rancho and throughout New Mexico. Instead of viewing our age as a liability, what if we viewed aging as an opportunity to let God make us more useful in building His kingdom and

spreading the Good News? Rather than fret about where the young people are, why not focus on celebrating the people who are already with us? What if we treated older adults like the asset they truly are? Let's face the fact that as older adults we have a tremendous power and opportunity to uniquely bless others?

The story of Abraham and Sarah invites us to let go of the idea that "old" means "less than" and to trust that God is working in us and this church to make us "exceedingly fruitful." Age has nothing to do with our relationship and service to the Lord. God does not look at age when He calls us into service. Remember Moses was eighty years old when he was tending his father-in-law's sheep and God called out to him from the burning bush. Also, age is not a factor on what you can accomplish in your life. Grandma Moses started painting at 76. Colonel Sanders started KFC at 65. And John Glenn went back into space at 77. Queen Elizabeth II ruled into her 90s.

John Wesley lived to be 89 years old. Do you know what he was doing the day that he died? Earlier in the day, he was serving soup and bread to people on the streets who had nothing. And after he finished, he walked home, laid his head on his pillow, and breathed his last breath. He went home to the Lord knowing that he had done all the good he could to all the people he could.

As individuals and churches, we have a choice. We can get comfortable in our retirement and sit back in our easy chairs and watch TV all day long as we grow old. Or we can use the time, experience, and resources that our retirements have given us to make a difference for the Lord in the lives of our families, friends, and community. I thank God that this church has chosen the latter and has embraced our mission and outreach programs.

Our journey through Lent this year has been a time of spring training as we have been focusing on getting in better shape spiritually. Over the past four weeks, we have discussed the spiritual disciplines of a daily quiet time, prayer, reading the Bible and fasting as we try to grow in our personal relationship with the Lord. This morning, let's discuss the spiritual discipline of service. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, He replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." In other words, love God and love others. Our mission statement as a church is based on this passage: Loving God. Serving Others. Changing Lives.

Jesus sets the example for us. He stated in Matthew 20:28 that He came not to be served, but to serve. Now that is contrary to the approach of many people and even churches in our society today. The modern philosophy is "me first," looking out for your own interests and not showing concern from those less fortunate. But as Christians, we are called to follow Jesus' example; we are called to serve, not to be served. Did you hear that; we are not here to be served, but to serve. We are called to show God's love to a world that is desperately in need of hope and love today. We witness for Jesus by how we love our neighbors. Albert Outler, one of the scholars of the Methodist Church, said it best: "The world hears the gospel when it sees it. When Christians are concerned with human existence and cares for the needs of the less fortunate."

As I have mentioned before, one of the best books that I have read on missions is entitled *The Hole in Our Gospel* by Richard Stearns. The basic idea behind it is quite simple; being a Christian requires much more than a personal relationship with God. It also entails a public relationship with the world. If your personal faith in Jesus Christ has no positive outward expression, then your faith has a hole in it. Someone once cut out every verse in the Bible that dealt with poverty, justice, sickness, and oppression, over 2,000 verses in the sixty-six books. Guess what? That Bible was full of holes. And so is our faith when we don't take an active role in serving others.

Sometimes we think that the Great Commission just means saving as many people as we can for the life hereafter; so, we tend to minimize our concern for the well-being of these very same people in this life. Focusing almost exclusively on the afterlife minimizes what God expects us to do in this life. Or as Johnny Cash sang: "You're so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good." Every Sunday in the Lord's Prayer we ask: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." These words were and are a clear call to those of us who follow Jesus Christ to not just proclaim the good news but to be the good news here and now. This gospel, the whole gospel, means much more than the personal salvation of individuals; it means fulfilling the Second Commandment: "To love our neighbor as ourself."

James 1:22 tells us to be doers of the Word and not merely listeners. James states very clearly that belief is not enough. It must be accompanied by faith demonstrated by actions. Jesus calls us to demonstrate His love to others through the good things we do, what the Bible calls "works." Faith without works is no faith at all or as James states in chapter two: "Faith without work is dead." In other words, we are saved by faith, and in turn, saved for works. The Apostle Paul reaffirmed this in Ephesians 2:10 when he wrote: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." It is not just what you believe that counts; it's what you believe in enough to do that matters. Saint Francis of Assisi understood what James was talking about when he said: "Preach the gospel always; when necessary use words."

Saint Teresa of Avila wrote: "Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now." We are called to be instruments of the gospel for the Lord. When we committed to follow Jesus, we also committed to living our lives in such a way that the world around us would catch a glimpse of Jesus' character and love.

To fill the hole in our gospel here at High Desert, we have adopted an aggressive mission and outreach program, such as the Food Pantry, Feed New Mexico Kids, Interfaith Bible Center, Operation Christmas Child, Basket Ministry, Prayer Shawl Ministry, MorningStar, 4Paws Food Program, St. Joseph Mission School, and Pastor Chris Davis ministry in Gallup and Navajo Nation. In addition, we have Second Mile Giving that supports local ministries and ministries all over the world.

Now some of you may be thinking, due to my physical condition, I cannot work at the Pantry or help with mission projects. However, there are many other ways to serve and make a difference in addition to supporting our Second Mile Givings. You can participate in the Prayer Chain, call and check on those who are homebound or in the hospital, send cards and letters of encouragement, and participate in Women with Purpose. Ask God to show you where He wants you to serve and then follow John Wesley's Rule of Life: "Do all the good you can; by all the means you can; in all the ways you can; in all the places you can; at all the time you can; to all the people you can; as long as you can."

The way of Jesus Christ is clear: love and service. Examples are all around us. We can't change the world overnight, but each one of us can do our part to make this a better place to live and show God's love through our daily activities, work, and acts of service to those around us. If you open your life to Jesus, He will make a difference in you and your attitude toward life. The best way to build a better world is to live each day like Jesus. As the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 6:9 – "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

At the Women with Purpose meeting in May 2021, Wanda Golsan gave each lady in attendance a \$5 bill and asked them to use it to do something good for somebody; in other words, to pass it on. The ladies used their \$5 in many different ways. Some bought supplies to make cookies that they took to homebound neighbors; others bought flowers; my wife Judy paid for the meal for the car behind her at MacDonalds. Many matched the \$5 and did more.

Lisa Isenberger bought some fabric and made a comfort bag with a bear and blanket. As a result of this effort, Women with Purpose have been periodically providing comfort bags to local police departments to be distributed to children during police crisis situations. There are many more stories that remind me of the Parable of the Mustard Seed in Mark 4:30-32 where Jesus said: "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground and becomes the largest of garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade." It is a fact that we will never know the impact that our small acts of kindness and service will have on others.

I was so impressed and moved by these stories that in July 2021, we expanded the program churchwide and gave everybody \$10 to pass on. I think it time that we do this again. So, as you leave this morning, you will receive a \$10 bill and a form to report back how you passed it on. Let's plant as many mustard seeds as we can during this season of Easter, and see how we can share God's love in our community.

In closing, remember age has nothing to do with it. We are called to serve. No matter how old we are or what our physical condition is, God has called us to make a difference for Him in any way we can. It is not your age that counts; it's your heart and attitude. Amen