

Assuming Too Much
Genesis 20:1-18
7-6-2025

I have a friend named Emerson, who used to be pastor of the Mililani BC and later at Waikoloa on the Big Island. He is passionate about two things.

The first was evangelism, always looking for ways to engage people in conversations about the Lord. When he was at Mililani, he often went into Waikiki on Friday nights wearing a sandwich sign with something provocative written on it which would often get passerby's to stop and ask him about it. For years he went to the Mardi Gras in New Orleans to do the same thing. He'd go all that way just to stand on street corners wearing a sandwich sign hoping to engage complete strangers in conversations in order to share the gospel.

He told me the biggest response he ever got was the year he wore a sign with only two words on it, I'm Sorry. People would stop and look at it then ask what did you do? What are you sorry for? To which he would answer, I'm sorry for all the wrongs that have been done in the name of Jesus, not just things like the inquisition and crusades, but the judgementalism that people sometimes suffer at the hands of Christians, the name calling and harsh rhetoric against other religions and people. The list could get quite long, but through discussion he'd find ways to connect and point them to the one who's love drove him not to condemn but offer the ultimate sacrifice of his body and blood.

His other great passion was golf. He often went out on his own, waiting to be paired with strangers. When he teed his ball up, whoever he was playing with couldn't help but notice the two large question marks he always drew on his golf balls. Over the course of the round, they would eventually ask him what they were for. He would tell them they are the two most important questions anyone can ask. Who is Jesus? And do you know you are going to heaven?

Before coming to Hawaii, he had pastored in Tennessee. It was a time when there was a lot of fighting for control of various boards and agencies in our convention. Some if it got really ugly and personal with a lot of name calling and stereotypes, exaggerations and assumptions being made about those on the other side. In many ways it was merely a precursor to our national politics today. People weren't listening to each other but demanding their way as the only way.

Emerson tried to avoid the politics which isa big reason he came to Hawaii, he was trying to get away from it all, especially in the south. He told me that one time he went out for a round of golf with another pastor in the area. When he teed up his ball and this other pastor saw the two question marks, he asked him about them. When Emerson told him, he said he could literally see this man's jaw drop. What are you doing with those? That's evangelism! You're a moderate. Moderates don't believe in Evangelism

How much damage is done by the assumptions we can make about others without bothering to really get to know them or find out the truth.
Living in an echo chamber so we can only hear what will feed our biases and preconceived ideas?

Jumping to conclusions based on bits and pieces of information, stereotypes and ignorance, or simply because your favorite celebrity or TV station puts the right spin on it to affirm your own suspicions and prejudices.

We so easily forget Jesus' word in Matthew 7:1-2, do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

That's what making assumptions, labeling, jumping to conclusions about others is, merely a form of judging them, usually without really knowing them.

while it was his faith for which Abraham was commended for, it was his assumptions on more than one occasion which got him into trouble.

Like in Gen. 12 when he almost lost his wife Sarah because of the assumptions he made about the Egyptians so he lied and said she was his sister and Pharoah tried to take her as his wife.

And Gen 16 when he grew impatient waiting for God to give him the promised son, so in spite of Gods promises, he assumed he could take matters into his own hands and took Sarahs servant Hagar as his wife.

And again, in Gen 20 he made assumptions about Abimelech and his people and once again lied about Sarah and Abimelech tried to add her to his harem

"Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, ad there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her. But God came to Abimelek in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman." Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die." Early the next morning Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done." And Abimelek asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?" Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife. And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, 'This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, "He is my brother." ' " Then Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and

male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. And Abimelek said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like." To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated." Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, for the LORD had kept all the women in Abimelek's household from conceiving because of Abraham's wife Sarah."
(Genesis 20:1–18)

Abraham immediately jumped to conclusions about Abimelek and assumed the worst from him

As he put it in verses 11, *'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'*

While it was, and is, a hard world filled with greed and hatred, selfishness and all types of sin, that does not give us cause to assume the worst of people and put up walls to keep those we consider unwanted out only associating with people like us, people we are comfortable with because they share our views

To expect the worst and close ourselves off from those who are lost and need to hear of Christ

Have we, like Abraham with Abimelech and his people, closed ourselves off from others because of our assumptions

Cut off a relationship because we made assumptions about them based on what they looked like, where they went, what they believed

Thinking that they are therefore less than us, not worth getting to know or caring about, unworthy of our time or attention?

I remember my grandmother, a lifelong devout and practicing Catholic, when she heard that my sister Kathy, started going to a Pentecostal church, warned her that those people are evil and she shouldn't have anything to do with them. My grandmother said this even though she had never even known anyone who was Pentecostal. She did have to make a radical adjustment to her assumptions when my sister married the

pastor's son and they were the ones God used to bring me to salvation and get involved in church.

Jesus is in the business of breaking down walls not building them up to keep others away

He goes to the least and the lost, the outcast and unwanted, the despised and rejected, all who those in power thought were somehow worth less compassion and care

We all need to learn to see all people as God sees them

Created by Him, in His image, people he loves and Jesus died for just the same as he did for us.

And we who have experienced firsthand the grace of God and cleansing power of his forgiveness, need to realize that the current climate of incivility in society, the climate of exclusion and alienation and labeling and name calling based far more on assumptions and preconceived ideas than on fact, has no place among Gods people

Yet so much of what I read coming out of national ministries and Christian groups seems to feed the flame more than tamp it down

Have we become so enculturated by our world, its values and politics, that we have become part of the problem of alienation and separation rather than pointing to the one who alone is the solution to it

Abraham expected the worst from Abimelech, that they couldn't be trusted and in seeking to protect himself he closed himself off from them

We must remember Jesus invited Judas into his inner circle knowing he would later betray him

We really need to watch using labels and stereotypes to reject people and entire groups because of assumptions and prejudices or simply because someone passed on some conspiracy about them

When we do this, we lose the ability to see who that person or people really are.

we have already judged them and made up our minds, and in a very real sense, dehumanized and made them less than us in our thoughts and the way we speak about and treat them.

We can become so afraid of being taken in by others that we are not able to open up

Doddie Gadiant had been an elementary school teacher for 13 years when she decided one summer to travel across the country to see all the sights that she had been teaching her children about for all those years.

Traveling alone in a pickup with a camper in tow, she launched out.

One afternoon as she was rounding a curve on the I-5 near Sacramento California during rush hour, the water pump on her truck blew out. She was tired, exasperated, scared, and all alone. In spite of the heavy traffic, no one seemed interested in stopping to help.

Leaning against her trailer, she prayed, Lord, please send me an angel, preferably one with some mechanical experience. Within 4 minutes, a huge Harley drove up, ridden by an enormous man with long black hair, thick beard, and tattoos all over his arms. And when he turned and she saw the words on the back of his jacket, she was terrified. It said, Hell's Angels, California.

With an incredible air of confidence, he jumped off his bike and without even glancing at Doddie, went to work on her truck. Within a few minutes, he flagged down a larger truck, attached tow chains to the frame, and whisked the truck and camper off the freeway and onto a side street where he calmly proceeded to work on the water pump. As he finished the task, she finally worked up enough nerve to tell him thank you and carried on a brief conversation. Noticing her fear, he looked her straight in the eye and mumbled, don't judge a book by its cover. You may not know who you're talking to. With that he smiled, closed the hood of the truck, straddled his Harley, and with a wave of his hand, was gone as fast as he appeared.

underlying all these others was Abraham's worst assumption of all, which was the complete breakdown of his faith when he assumed that after making His promises to Abraham, that God would allow any of what he feared to happen

As I have pointed out previously, Abraham was known for his faith not his perfection
in looking at his failures, my intent is not to take away from his example of faith but learn more from it.

sometimes we can look at him or others in scripture, and rather than learn from their faith we become intimidated by it, using it to excuse our lack, assuming they were somehow different and special which is why God chose them

in looking not just at his great faith but also his failures in spite of it, we see that he was just a normal person like all of us

that just as we struggle sometimes with faith, so did Abraham the man of faith just as we sometimes let our fears take over, so did Abraham, the father of all who believe

just as we try to take matters into our own hands, so did Abraham the one whose faith was credited to him as righteousness

but these didn't keep him from God or disqualify him from future service he kept coming back to God and through his great victories and defeats he learned and his faith grew even more
and if he did that, so can we.

Our failures don't have to be fatal!

They don't have to disqualify or defeat us.

Like Abraham and all the saints in scripture, we too can keep getting back up and come back to God with the confident assurance that he will never reject us

From the beginning of Gods dealings with Abraham, the **central element of all Gods promises, was that God would both bless him, and make him a blessing to others.**

Gods' intent from the start, was to touch the world through Abraham and the work of salvation which would come through him in the person of Jesus.

But I suspect Pharaoh didn't feel like he was blessed when he and his household were inflicted by serious diseases because of Abraham's lie about Sarah.

I don't think the world has felt very blessed by the constant fighting for the past 4000 years between the descendants of Abraham and Ishmael, the son of Hagar. I don't think Abimelech felt very blessed when God threatened to punish him for taking Sarah into his harem.

And I don't think our neighbors or the world around us will feel very blessed if we keep Him to ourselves because we're too afraid to tell them about Jesus
Or because we assume someone else will tell them
Or we assume the work of the church, some ministry is someone else's responsibility so we don't have to step up or get involved

Or if we become so enamored by the world that we are caught in its web of lies and deceit and fearmongering and desire for power and influence
Or we become so conformed to our culture and our world that people can't see any difference between us as Christ followers and the cause that we have been conformed to

Who knows what opportunities have been lost simply because we jumped to conclusions about someone or something without bothering to check it out, we accepted some piece of gossip without discernment
We assumed the worst in someone

God doesn't bless us for our own sake; he blesses us to touch others!
And he blesses us with the intent that we will come apart and be separate and different from the world around us

Like Abraham we are all called to live by faith not by our assumptions
And therefore, as I cited already, Jesus did warn us,

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Matthew 7:1–2)

Max Lucado wrote, Recently we took our kids on a vacation to a historical city. While going on a tour through an old house, we followed a family from New York City. They didn't tell me they were from New York. They didn't have to. I could tell. They wore New York City clothes. Their teenager had one half of his head shaved and on the other half of his head, his hair hung past his shoulders. The daughter wore layered clothes and long beads. The mother looked like she raided her daughters' closet, and the dad's hair was down the back of his neck.

I had them all figured out. The kid was probably on drugs. The parents were going through a midlife crisis. They were rich and miserable and in need of counseling. Good thing I was nearby in case they wanted spiritual counsel.

After a few moments they introduced themselves. I was right, they were from New York City. But that was all I got right. When I told them my name, they were flabbergasted. We can't believe it! They all said. We've read your books. We used them in our Sunday School class at church. I tried to get over to hear you when you spoke in our area, but that was our family night.

Sunday School? Church? Family Night? Oh boy, I'd made a mistake. A huge mistake. I'd applied the label before examining the contents.

We've all used labels. We stick them on jars and manila folders so we know what's inside. We also stick them on people for the same reason.

Are there assumptions you are making about someone? About some group? About yourself?

Like Emerson tried to help people understand with his golf balls, one assumption we must not make is about our salvation and relationship with God.

Some of Abrahams descendants made that type of assumption, believing that simply because they were descendants of Abraham, went to temple, obeyed the laws, were good upstanding people, they had it made.

John the Baptist disabused them of that notion when he said in Matthew 3:9-10 *"And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."* (Matthew 3:9–10)

Salvation is not something to guess at but we can know for certain

1 John 5:13 says *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."*

If you do not know, I invite you to talk with me after service or during the week.