

Covenant Relationship & Vision
Genesis 17:1-9 Genesis 15:1-10, 17-20
Sermon by Rev. Garrett Walkup
Third Sunday after Epiphany
Woodbury UMC
March 13, 2022

Our theme during Lent is, “Where is God calling Woodbury United Methodist Church?” Trying to discern that calling can feel a lot like looking at one puzzle piece and trying to figure out the whole image. We can feel insignificant in comparison and even overwhelmed. But one way we can begin to understand calling is by looking at how God interacted with his people in scripture. Pastor Michael shared a little bit about that. He introduced that idea last week. He looked at it from the Old Testament and we do that again today. Today’s reading tells us the story of God’s covenant relationship with Abraham. You see, when God established a covenant relationship, he had a vision for whoever that person was and he does the same with us. The covenant was often very simple. I will be your God. You will be my people. The word covenant actually means to cut. And, how covenant was established was you literally would sacrifice and cut small animals. Then the person who had to keep the promises of that covenant would walk in between those animals. I know that's kind of graphic, but that's how they did it. The reason why they would

sacrifice animals and then walk in between the pieces is because the idea was that if I don't keep my end of the bargain, it may be done to me what has been done to these animals. This is not a relationship that was taken lightly or casually in an establishing covenant relationship. With Abraham, a couple chapters earlier, in Genesis 15, there's something interesting that happens in that passage. Instead of what we would all think - that Abraham would be the one that would have to then walk through those cut animal pieces - it's God who passes in between them. This is an interesting shift about what God is committing and what he is saying by doing that on his own. With Abraham, God promises three things. He says I promise you land which we now famously call the promised land. He promises descendants which is what we heard in the reading this morning and he also promises blessing and redemption. Land, descendants, blessing and redemption. Covenant relationship is very different than consumer relationship. You see consumer relationship says if I don't get what I want, what I like or what I expect, I move on. I move on from that relationship to find another, right? You and I do this all the time whenever we are making choices. Think more specifically about the ways that you spend your money. That's a consumer relationship. If you go somewhere and you don't like what you get, you find someplace else. That's consumer

relationship. But, see, covenant relationship is where the two parties involved say we agree, commit, and vow to serve one another, to protect one another, and to meet the needs of one another. That's very different. You see what happens, when we enter into covenant relationships, especially with God, is that something else begins to occur. When we are in covenant relationship with one another we start to see what the other person sees. You see we develop these deep bonds. We see hurts. We see fears. We see needs. We share in joys. That's what we start to build as we have covenant relationship with God and with one another. Out of that comes empathy and also vision. We start to see what the other person sees and they start to look at the world through our eyes as well. Covenant relationship with God also gives us vision for his creation. When we enter into a sacred holy relationship with God we will start to see the world through his eyes. Even though Pastor Michael is not here, I am contractually obligated to talk about superheroes. If you think about it, what's true of every single superhero is that when they see an injustice, when they see something that is wrong, they all respond the same way. Their response is I can't stand this anymore. I'm going to do something about it! You see this as people who love God and, therefore, love others. This should be true of us as well. There's one author pastor and he

describes this idea. I love this phrase. He calls this being 'holy discontent.' His definition of that idea, being holy discontent, is when you experience an uneasy spirit; when something doesn't sit right in your gut; when something that you are observing or interacting with makes you mad or makes you cry; when you see something that is broken in this world; you become discontent with it. When it becomes holy discontent is when that unsettling, that uneasiness in your spirit, that when something that's not sitting right with you aligns with the heart of God, it spurs you on to take action, to change whatever that is, whatever is broken in this world. Now it is a holy discontent. Moses looked at God's enslaved people and said no more. The boy David watched his people being defeated and said no more. Now we use the phrase "not on my watch." Justice Southbury says, "I will stand on this corner, getting yelled at, honked at, sworn at, in the freezing cold because I see a wrong that needs to be called out." Did I get it right? That's about seeing a holy discontent. That's looking at issues that are in this world and saying those things are broken and I'm aligning myself with the heart of God and with his people and I'm going to do something about it. There's a world-renowned chef named Jose Andres. He's Spanish. He has high-end restaurants all over the world. Not only does he feed people through his gifts and talents at those high-end restaurants, but a

few years ago, he started feeding people that were not able to afford to come into his restaurants. He saw natural disasters that would hit - a hurricane hit Puerto Rico, wildfires out west, flooding in Houston, flooding in southeast Asia after a tsunami and he started going into these places and feeding them. There is now an entire foundation, a non-profit organization, that's all around the world, that literally started just a few years ago that he started called World Central Kitchen. He and his team show up and feed people. You can probably guess where they are right now. They are on the borders of Ukraine as people are flooding over. He's feeding them. You see, there's somebody that was maybe watching the news and he saw the hurt as a hurricane hit an island or an earthquake hit. Here's a guy who was watching that and said that doesn't sit right with me. That's upsetting. It sat there in his spirit. Then he took all of his food and he went to that place and he set up a few tables and he started feeding people.

What is your vision for yourself ? In other words, what is your calling Woodbury United Methodist Church? What is your vision for your community? When you look around, what do you see that makes your spirit uneasy? What, to you, is broken? I gave kind of some big examples: Moses, David, a world-renowned chef. We could go on down the list: Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King and we can look at those people and say, "I'm not

one of those people, those are big people!” It can be kind of easy almost to say we don't have the ability to even get up and move because we can look at that and say I can't do that! I can't feed hundreds of people on the Ukrainian border! I don't know even where to start! I'm just this little person! But, see that's the beautiful thing about a puzzle or a tile mosaic. A tile mosaic is made up of hundreds and hundreds or thousands of thousands of tiny little pieces of broken glass or pottery. Who knows where your vision might go. Who knows what that mosaic might turn into. Just start with yourself. Go easy on yourself. Don't have this big lofty goal that you might feel overwhelmed to even get yourself off the ground. Just start right here in your heart and who knows what beautiful mosaic might come out of it. Our prayer today is that God would let us see the world as he does. That's the vision that I have for us. That's the theme that we have for Lent this year. God, would you let me see, would you let all of us see the world as you do? Amen.