Abraham Covenant

Gen 17:1-7,15,16

St Francis

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9am

I recently went to the funeral of my sister-in-law’s father, Geoffrey. Firstly we had the tribute from the minister saying what a kind and caring man he was. Then we had a tribute from one of his work colleagues, known as Waggy. Now Geoffrey was an eye surgeon at Kings College hospital and his colleague gave an amazing tribute about him, and how he had achieved many things in his medical career, including inventing a method for reattaching retinas using lasers. I thought, wow, he kept that quiet. But Waggy, who was a young trainee doctor in the 1980s working under Geoffrey, saved the best till last. He said in those days you were taught to regard your mentor as a parent – he said, “I did and I have lost a father”. It brought a tear to all our eyes.

What is life all about?

For some it’s all about getting by, living out each, day, not making too many waves, enjoying life as best you can.

For others it’s all about achieving something, making your mark on history, fulfilling your destiny regardless of obstacles, being ready to face the greatest challenges head on.

For still others it is all about relationships – being ready to give and receive love even when sacrifice is called – being united with those we care for.

For Waggy, for all Geoffrey’s achievement’s in the medical field, it was the mutual help and support which marked out his character and stood out the most.

Today we remember Abraham, not as a man of destiny or achievement, but as the man of the covenant. A covenant is a bond of love, a relationship of love and mutuality characterised by the offering of gifts and sacrifice. That was his identity, that was his meaning.

Let’s recall Abraham’s story briefly: **called** to leave his birthplace of Ur of the Chaldees, journeying to Canaan, inheritor of a **promise** from God that he would be a father of many nations, but suffering many **trials** and struggles along the way.

In our reading we come to Abraham, an old man, laughing at his own frailty and dreams probably feeling that he has achieved nothing in life. The promise has become a forgotten memory which has crumbled into dust. He was, if you like, just getting by, trying to make something out of nothing by taking the slave girl Hagar to be his surrogate wife.

Are living out your dreams, or are you just getting by?

But God isn’t finished yet. The Lord speaks again!

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘I am God Almighty;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+17&version=NIVUK" \l "fen-NIVUK-399a" \o "See footnote a)] walk before me faithfully and be blameless. **2**Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.’

What is God on about? How can this be? In verse 17 Abraham gives his response:

**17**Abraham fell face down; he laughed and said to himself, ‘Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’

I love the way the Bible records the fact that Abraham laughs and mutters to himself!

But God works in his way at his own speed. He doesn’t care for our timetable and our sense of urgency, to have it all fulfilled by tomorrow! Instead he has his own agenda which may be slightly longer time-frame than we wish for. Abraham’s calling hasn’t been forgotten even at his venerable age. God will still do what he is going to do.

What plans does God still have for you? What it your calling? Age doesn’t matter! We can still do new things whether we are 19, 59 or 89. God can still use us. Medical science can put bionic valves in our heart to give us a new lease of life! We don’t ever retire from being a Christian.

But more important than any accomplishments that Abraham might have achieved, was that he was in a covenant of love. That is what God wanted him to learn and accept: that Yahweh would be their God and He would love them, and they would love him. All the while that Abraham was worrying about his legacy, his CV, God was saying to him, “you and your people are in a relationship with me and that is all that matters”.

How does life look to you? You might be at the beginning, or you might be well along the path. How would you like to be remembered?

At the moment candidates are putting themselves forward to be on a manned mission to Mars. The only thing is that it is a one way trip. There is no return flight planned. Who would ever volunteer for such a thing? Apparently, plenty of people. On being questioned as to their reasons for this, one candidate said, “who could possibly pass up the chance of being the first human to set foot on Mars. That name would live forever in history.”

Really? Is that worth dying for? Not in my book. No, instead, to be part of a covenant relationship of love open to all who receive it – would that be worth dying for? Well as you know, someone did die for that – Jesus Christ.

He died so that all could enjoy the epitaph – one with their saviour, and a father or mother to many. Amen.