

## ***“You don’t have to have it all figured out”***

**February 28, 2010**

*Text: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Luke 21:10-15*

### I.

Life is a process. We know that, don’t we? Think about your life. It’s a process, isn’t it—an unfolding? No matter where any of us is along our life’s journey, our life is a process. And one of the keys for us is to *trust in the process*.

However, that’s easier said than done, isn’t it? So often in our lives, we want things to happen NOW or in a time that we choose. We see this often with promotions at work or with job interviews. We’re waiting for the word or for the call—waiting and waiting ... agonizing and agonizing.

Then, we have to remind ourselves: it’s a process. Things take time; time for the many variables to fall into place; time for details to be worked out; time for new revelations and understandings to emerge.

We see this again and again in romance, too, don’t we? In the time of courtship, particularly with women. Sometimes future brides spend many a sleepless night, agonizing: *when is he going to ask me to marry him? What’s taking him so long? Last Saturday evening was the perfect time and situation. I thought it was going to happen ...*

And then, once the engagement happens, parents, family and friends wonder: when are they going to get married? Have they set the date? How long have they been engaged? I thought for sure they’d be married by now.

Whether it’s receiving a job offer, being promoted at work; whether it’s marriage proposals and wedding plans—they’re all part of a process, aren’t they? If we can get to the point where we understand this and accept it—that life is a process—then, **we don’t have to have it all figured out**; and that ought to be a relief to many of us.

Our lives are never as settled and air-tight as we’d like them to be. Always, stuff is happening—new challenges enter our lives that we didn’t anticipate. In life, there’s no *point of arrival*. There’s no time, after which we can say with confidence, *I made it, I’ve arrived, I’m there*. Always, it’s a process.

### II.

Understanding life as a *process* is part of Abraham’s challenge in our reading from **Genesis 15** this morning. For both Abraham and Sarah, the *process* of their unique relationship with God started with *the promise*.

Very simply, *the promise* (announced in **Genesis 12**) was that God would make of them *a great nation ... and I will bless you*, God said, *and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.*

The context, of course, is that Abraham and Sarah are called out of *barrenness*. That's a tough beginning upon which to build a life of faith and trust. *Barrenness* can be a terrible burden. There are all sorts of unflattering social stigma attached to *barrenness*.

People talk about you. They put you down and say mean things about you. They wonder *what's wrong with you, why are you so deficient? Why can't you get pregnant?*

Another problem with *barrenness* is that, over time, as the years pass, you can't imagine the *barrenness* ever ending. After all these years, if it hasn't happened yet, why would things suddenly change?

Put another way, we think: how can some delayed, unachieved reality (something that's never happened before) suddenly break through in the sinking present of my life? *Again and again—week after week, month after month—it hasn't happened*, we think to ourselves. Why would it suddenly happen now?

Abraham's problem with God is that Abraham can't get beyond *the promise*. He can't move beyond it—not that he should. But, then, what's he to do? From early on, from his initial call, God had promised Abraham and Sarah that their seed would fill the earth.

But still—**nothing**—and *barrenness* continues to greet them in the dawning of every day.

### III.

Along with Abraham and Sarah, one of the lessons we all eventually learn in life is that **we don't have to have everything all figured out**. Put another way, we don't have to KNOW the final outcome ahead of time in order to engage in the process to begin with.

Lesson to be learned: *trust the process*.

For Abraham, *trusting the process* becomes translated into *having faith*. In our Judeo-Christian tradition, we hear all the time about *the faith of Abraham*. Certainly, Abraham's abiding faith is well-deserved, but it doesn't come without some agonizing moments of personal frustration and struggle.

Having already received the promise, in the words from **Genesis 15**—where God tries to reassure him, telling him not to be afraid and to hang in there—Abraham vents his frustration: *O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless? You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.*

Wanting to reassure Abraham, God takes him outside and says to him, *Look towards heaven and count the stars if you can. So shall your descendants be!*

And **Genesis** adds, *And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

#### IV.

*Trusting the process* takes inner strength ... and patience ... and personal faith and belief. It asks us to let go of the need to always be in control and to have everything in its place. It reminds us, again, that **we don't have to have everything all figured out.**

We don't have to know the final outcome. There's something to be said, in life, for *trusting in the moment* (where each moment is part of the process).

The **Zen Buddhists** tell the story of a monk fleeing from a hungry tiger. Approaching the edge of a cliff, the tiger in hot pursuit, the monk notices a vine growing over the cliff's edge.

However, as he grabs hold of the vine and begins to climb down the cliff, the monk looks beneath him only to discover another tiger wetting his lips for him from below. Making matter worse, out of the corner of his eye, he notices a mouse on a ledge above gnawing through the vine. Gloom is all about, it seems.

Then, out of the corner of his other eye, he notices a strawberry growing from the rock. The monk, then—calmly—picks the strawberry and eats it. We're probably going something like, *what was that? What just happened?*

The point of the story—from the Buddhist perspective; but it's also a good lesson for us Christians as well—is to *trust the moment*. We need to be able to pick more strawberries and eat them, trusting the process along the way.

Again, **we don't have to have it all figured out.**

This does not mean that we are not supposed to work hard, study hard, pray hard, love hard and take good care of ourselves in mind, body and spirit and on and on. It just means that, having done that—having tried to live a good life, be a good person, and do our best to honor our commitments—that **we don't have to have all the answers.**

**We don't have to have it all figured out.**

And not only that: when we learn to trust the process, friends, we sleep a lot better at night.

V.

In our reading from **Luke's gospel**, Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for some tough days ahead. He's already entered Jerusalem. It's the last week of his earthly life; there's a heaviness in the air with danger looming all around.

In a nutshell: the alternative world that Jesus has announced and has been personally *living out* is in conflict with the status quo. All about, there's mounting tension. Things are happening; and Jesus wants the disciples to be prepared.

*You're going to be arrested, he tells them, and persecuted ...and you'll be handed over to synagogues and prisons ...and brought before kings and governors, all because of me.*

However, *you won't need to prepare any defense in advance ... because **I will give you the words**; and I'll give you a wisdom, too, that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.*

What this suggests is that when we work hard, pay our dues, and try to do the right things in our lives, that we're probably a lot more prepared than we think for the challenges before us.

**We don't have to have everything all figured out.**

The appropriate words will come. The right actions will come. We need only stay close to God, practice the presence of love and hold fast to hope in all things.

That's it, friends! That's the faithful life to which God calls us in Christ.

In accord with our deepest commitments: do what we need to do, say what we need to say; and trust the process—always remembering that—through it all—in faith, trust and hope, there is nothing that can separate us from God's love.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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