

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 7th Sunday After Pentecost, July 12, 2015

The God of Abraham Praise

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July 12, 2015

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 Romans 4:13-25

The hymn “The God of Abraham Praise” first stanza begins, “The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above; the ancient of eternal days, the God of love.”

The God of love – that is who our God is --- the same God who is worshipped by Christians, Jews, Muslims and many other religions. All of these faiths are monotheistic and all look to the God of Abraham as the one true God.

You all know Jason Myers. In response to a particularly sticky and controversial question posed of him on Facebook, he replied, “*The long answer is found in Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. While isolated verses can be used to justify any position, the grand sweep of Scripture supports love ... no matter the form it takes.*” Jason is correct. Our God, the God of Abraham is the God of love.

How is it that of all the supposed gods out there, the great majority of people in this world worship Abraham’s God?

The answer lies in our scripture reading from Genesis which tells of a promise, a covenant of love, a promise that Abraham and Sarah, despite their very advanced ages, shall have a son, Isaac, born to them whose descendants will number in the millions.

Abraham had another son, Ishmael, born to him by Hagar, Sarah’s handmaiden. Out of love God made the same promise to Hagar and Ishmael that his descendants would also number in the millions.

The descendants of these two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, populated the known world at that time and it is through them that Judaism, and subsequently Christianity in the case of Isaac, and Islam, in the case of Ishmael, developed. They all look to the God of Abraham as the one true God and they all consider themselves to be descendants of Abraham. This includes converts from other areas who, while not actual descendants of Abraham, look to Abraham figuratively as their spiritual father. As Benno Jacob¹ put it, the converts who “... *confess the God of Abraham ... thus become*

the equals of Abraham's 'seed'. He ... (is) the father of all the faithful."

This is how it all started and is why so much of the world, in one way or another, worships the God of love, the God of Abraham, as the one true God.

The extent of the love that God has for us is pointed out in our scripture reading from Paul's letter to the Romans. God made an incredible promise to Abraham that he would become a great nation and that in and through him all peoples on earth would be blessed. As William Barclay² puts it, "... *the earth would be given to him as his inheritance ... because of the faith that he showed to God. It did not come because he piled up merit by doing works of the law. It was the outgoing of God's generous grace in answer to Abraham's absolute faith. The promise as Paul saw it (in our scripture reading) was dependent on two things and two things only --- the free grace of God (God's love) and the perfect faith of Abraham.*"

Paul Achtemeir³ said, "*Lines of grace converge in Abraham. He is the origin of God's promise of grace to humankind, God's answer to the ravages of human evil. ... In Abraham, God undertakes a new beginning, calling Abraham out of his familiar and secure surroundings to begin a pilgrimage founded on trust in the God who led him out ... Abraham's response to the God who called him forth, as well as his trust that God could give him an heir, display the faithfulness appropriate to God Finally, it was from the seed of Abraham that the Redeemer came, a Redeemer who died to deliver us from sin and who rose from the dead as the reality of a renewed relationship with God. All of those lines converge in Abraham. Small wonder then that Paul (in his letter to the Romans) finds in him a key to understanding the meaning of God's faithful grace (and love) and our appropriate response.*"

Walter Bruggeman, et al⁴, said that, "*The bottom line of so much of our human struggle is the question of God, not so much whether there is a God, but what kind of God there is. Is the one at the heart of the universe a reliable God, a God of compassion, (a God of love) in whom we dare to trust? Or are we at the mercy of chance, left with no grounds for asking of life questions of meaning and purpose? Or is God primarily an impersonal force who started things off but then let history run its own course, or an impervious deity whose ears are deaf to human cries and whose hands are helplessly and eternally tied? Sometimes the question of God seems to be the only question.*"

Paul is struggling with these issues albeit in a different way than we do. He wrestles throughout his letter to the Romans with the question of how God can do what he does --- how God can possibly justify ungodly people. How indeed!

In our scripture reading Paul makes three major points about God:

First, God “... *gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.*” (NIV).

Walter Bruggeman, et al⁵, said: “*Faith, then, means giving space to the surprising power of God, refusing to settle for what is possible or what is reasonable. Believers, like Abraham and Sarah, turn out to be unrealistic and even a bit mad, because their worldview includes the activity of the God of creation, who continues to bring ‘into existence the things that do not exist.’ It is not their ‘faith’ that works miracles, but the One in whom they trust.*”

Second, “*God had the power to do what he had promised.*” (NIV)

“*The all-powerful God is not turned into a genie who redirects the course of bullets and guarantees that all our crises will have happy endings ... Rather, the context for our reflection about God’s activity in the world and in our lives is the divine promise*”.⁶

Abraham and Sarah had faith in God’s divine promise even though it appeared to be impossible --- at 99 years of age to father a son who would parent an entire nation. They trusted that God would honor the commitments that he made to them --- and he did!

Third, God was the one “... *who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.*” (NIV).

That was God’s ultimate act. He was the producer and director of, as Walter Bruggeman, et al⁷, puts it, “... *the entire Christ-event. God the creator and God the promise keeper find their fullest expression in God the Redeemer. What has been promised becomes gospel in Jesus’ death and resurrection. The One in whom both Abraham and Paul trusted has given a more complete self-revelation, has brought forgiveness of sins, and has set things right.*” This is our God of Love.

“The God of Abraham Praise” ends with:

“*You have eternal life implanted in the soul; Your love shall be our strength and stay, while ages roll. We praise You loving God! We praise Your holy name: the first, the last, beyond all thought, and still the same.*” **Amen.**

1. Benno Jacob, The First Book of the Bible: Genesis, KTAV Publishing House, New York, 1974
2. William Barclay, The Letter to the Romans, rev. ed., Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1975
3. Paul Achtemeir, Interpretation: Romans, John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1985
4. Walter Bruggeman, et al, Texts for Preaching, Year B, Westminster / John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1993
5. Ibid.
6. Op. Cit.
7. Op. Cit.

All scriptural quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011