

February 28, 2021

Message Series/Sermon: Heart to Heart Part 1

Scriptural Lesson: Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16

Preacher: Kirstie J.Engel

We are continuing with our *Heart to Heart* series; a series designed to look at the heart of what the Scriptures are saying; that might also give us some direction of what the heart of our mission might be for such a time as this.

- And so today, my preaching goal is to direct this heart to heart message to you as the individual. I am talking about you and I am talking about me;
- So that we can hopefully take what we have learned on the singular level and expand our insights and learnings to the larger community.
- And so allow me first to set the story up for us this morning;
- And let me first say that there are a number of directions or themes that I believe we could use to unpack this story today;

- **We are seeing a theme** of another covenant emerging in this text; this time between God and Abram; promising him that he would become the **father of many nations**.
- **There is a theme** of blessings in this text, where God is promising to make Abram fruitful; because typically the gift of young children from God is usually seen as a blessing.
- **There is a theme** of transformation since in this passage; the text tells us that God in this passage announced that there will be a change of names for Abram and Sarai.
- **Abram** (“exalted father”) was to become **Abraham**, a name whose etymology cannot now be traced with certainty, but which the author explains as somehow indicating “father of a multitude.”¹
- **Sarai** was to become **Sarah**, not involving a change in the meaning, since both meant “princess,” but a change of an older, specialized feminine ending to the more

¹ Wesleyan Bible Commentary, Volume 1, Part 1: Genesis-Deuteronomy

common feminine ending. It was, in a sense, a freshening of the name.²

- Where I would like to place my sermonic tent on today is examining these **nations** that God is speaking about;
- And so **as I am** engaging this text, **why these nations are** pulling at my heart strings so much is that for some reason, it is clarifying some things for me as it pertains to the reconciling statement we as a church are striving to live by.
- And that is; **that this resistance that this country** and perhaps world has struggled with as a whole, as it pertains to what it means to be inclusive; **is in fact not biblical;**
- **This implied but sometimes blatant objection** that some seem to have towards those considered to be “the other,” are not in fact **compatible with the heart of God.**
- For the questions that are being raised in my frame of mind as it pertains to this mentioning of nations are;

²Wesleyan Bible Commentary

- **Who were these** nations that were going to come from Abram?
- **Would they all be** of the same belief system?
- **Would they all be** of the same ethnicity and race?
- **Would they all have** the same values?
- **Would they all live** by the same set of cultural norms and standards?
- **Would they all live by** the same set of values?
- You see, these somewhat rhetorical questions that I am lifting up for us today are important for us to consider;
- Because the one theme that is evident in my eyes as I wrestle with these questions myself; is that **a theme of reconciliation** is emerging from this text as apparent as the silver in my hair;
- Because when you and I really think about what God is blessing Abraham with;
- We intuitively must know, **that these nations would not remain the same** as how they started;
- Common logic will inform us, that these multitude of nations would evolve and transform every time another generation is birthed;

- Just as this is the case for the modern day family of today;
- Where although our genealogy **may begin** in one part of the world; as each generation procreates with others; the family structure and genealogy expands;
- For in my own ancestry DNA that both my husband and I investigated; I learned that my own personal ancestry consist of Asia, Europe, Nigeria, Scandinavia, Russia and more!
- Furthermore in bringing the definition of **nations biblically** into our conversation; I stopped by to suggest that the word nations is interchangeable with the word Gentiles³;
- Furthermore a Gentile is as most of us known one who is not Jewish;
- **The word Gentile**, stems from the Hebrew term goy, which means a “nation,” and was applied both to the Hebrews and **to any other nation.**

³ brittanica.com

- So you see Church, essentially since “Gentiles means nations,” according to Smith’s Bible Dictionary; the term Gentile **doesn’t really describe who someone is, but rather who they are not** – a Jew. ⁴
- Therefore, this is a long way of suggesting that a Gentile, is one belonging **to any nation or people group** other than the Jewish people group; **which further means that a Gentile in this sense** can come in a variety of shades of skin color;
- **A Gentile can** consist of varied ethnicities;
- **A Gentile according** to the Bible would infer a number of varied belief systems; I.e. The Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, is not from the same race, ethnicity, belief and value system as the Syrophonecian woman that asks Jesus to heal her demon possessed daughter in the book of Mark 7 and so forth.
- Furthermore, although we are not in the New Testament just yet; where you and I are informed that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, consisted of Jesus bringing good news to

⁴ christianity.com

the poor; proclaiming release to the **captives** and recovery of sight to the blind; where the oppressed go **free**; **this all proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor**;

- I stopped by to proclaim that **this favor** applied to **all nations**;
- **This favor** applied to both the Jews and the Gentiles;
- Church, this is what the Triune God; Creator, Son and Holy Spirit was blessing Abraham on that day; that needed to be reiterated when Jesus came down to Earth; **both human and divine**;
- **This idea that God** was going to take the once barren couple of Abraham and Sarah and bless them with a **multitude of nations**;
- **The Lord has reappeared** to renew God's promises and covenant; to amplify the nature of the promises, and to clarify the conditions expected of Abram and his descendants.⁵

⁵ Wesleyan Commentary

- **The Triune God in my theological engagement**, will continue to reappear to humanity until we get this one point and one point only;
- **That God is not ok** with marginalization;
- **God is not ok with** oppression;
- **God is not ok with** racism;
- **God is not ok** with exclusion;
- For the Gospel **is a message of Inclusion**;
- **It is a message**, to let all living beings know, trust and understand that God's love truly applies to all of us;
- **Regardless of our** race;
- **Regardless of our** ethnicity;
- **Regardless of our** social class;
- **Regardless of our** education;
- **Regardless of our** hangups;
- **Regardless of our** setbacks;
- **Regardless of our own** biases that we have been raised up in;
- **That would suggest that** someone is inferior to another being;

- **That would imply that** someone is more entitled than another being;
- **That would infer that** someone is of more worth and sacredness than another being;
- **God came to proclaim,** that ideas such as this, are in fact **only an ideology, but not the theology** that God would have us believe about God's nature.
- I ask again, **Who were these nations that were going to come from Abram?**
- This is the work that we must deconstruct together so that we may begin to construct a more accurate reflection of God's heart and God's intent.
- God came down then and keeps dwelling among us to give the world and all its inhabitants a heart to heart;
- **To give the world a reality check;**
- To proclaim that God loves all of God's children;
- **God in God's covenant** was celebrating the fruit that was to come from these nations who we all still represent;
- **God was encouraging** this diversity and proclaiming that nations would rise in multitudes;

- **This is the reality** of God's heart Church that we must reconcile;
- **This is the type of theology** that we must construct and proclaim if we wish to repair the harm that the Church has done through; harmful ideologies that are not the essence of who God is;
- These are the messages of resurrection that we must plant within the hearts of everyone who has been made to feel like anything but a child of God;
- **Our dancer Olivia this morning who danced to the song I Trust You; by James Fortune;**
- Although this may not be a song familiar to this worship context;
- I submit that for us to learn to live out the reconciling statement we are declaring as a community;

To become a community centered, focused and driven community seeking to share God's affirming love to everyone. We are a Reconciling Congregation whose story reflects a statement of diversity and love for all. First Church is inclusive to

all persons regardless of education, ability, economic status, gender, race, ethnic group, age or sexual orientation;

- we must hear the story from these nations;
- **Sweet Olivia is dancing to a story of nations** who have been told that they are not part of God's family;
- **She was dancing to a story of nations** who have been turned away for a variety of reasons and identifies how this has severely impacted their lives as a result;
- So the song reflected a nation; **who although have placed on the waste side;**
- **This song reflects on the contrary**, a nation possessing a knowledge of who God is, and who God is not;
- **A God who will continue** to make a way for all of God's family;
- **A God who values** every human life as sacred and worthy.

- Family; God in God's covenant as I close part 1 of this message; told Abraham as Abram fell facedown; from what I would imagine was not just a place of respect in awe of God; **but Abram fell down** in my imagination; at the knowledge of just how much God loved him and all who would come from him;
- God said to him, **4** "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. **5** No longer will you be called Abram[b]; your name will be Abraham, [c] for I have made you a father **of many nations**. **6** I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.
- **7** I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.
- So **my heart to heart to you** this morning is that if you should find yourself in any other community that does not make you feel like royalty, then it might be time to find a new community.

- **If you should find yourself in a space** where you do not feel seen; then perhaps it is time for you to reconsider;
- The covenant that was made to humanity;
- A covenant that is steeped in nothing but love and affirmation;
- A covenant that names us all as royalty in God's heart.
- Let the Church say Amen and Hallelujah

February 28, 2021

Message Series/Sermon: Heart to Heart

First Lesson: **Psalm 22: 23-31**

Gospel Lesson: Mark 8: 31-38

Preacher: Kirstie J.Engel

We are continuing with our *Heart to Heart* series; a series designed to look at the heart of what the Scriptures are saying; that might also give us some direction of what the heart of our mission might be for such a time as this.

- And so today, my preaching goal is to direct this heart to heart message **to the heart of the church.**
- This morning, we examined a new concept that I lifted up out of God's covenant with Abraham, that when God proclaimed that Abraham would be the father of many nations; biblically defining the nations that God was talking to; revealed that the word nations and Gentiles are interchangeable.
- In other words, **Gentiles means** anyone who is not Jewish;
- **Gentiles means** that the people who this covenant applied to consisted of different races, nationalities and more;
- So for me, this morning opened up a dialogue, that would claim that God would celebrate the idea of a rec-

onciling church, with a reconciling mission of being loving and inclusive to all people.

- In fact I would make the claim that the Triune God; Creator, Son and Holy Spirit; celebrated this idea of the reconciling church so much; that Jesus came to Earth **to re-iterate this very declaration again!**
- Because in unpacking our gospel this morning, when it says that Jesus *began* (v. 31) ; this is significant for us.
- For it marks a new departure in Jesus' ministry.
- You see, prior to, Jesus had been dealing mainly with the multitudes—healing, teaching, preaching.
- From now on at this point, Jesus would spend most of His time instructing His disciples, preparing them for the time when He must leave them and they would have to carry on the work of the Kingdom.
- A main topic in this private teaching was His coming death and resurrection.
- In common with all Jews, the apostles expected a Messiah who would come in glory to reign over an earthly kingdom.

- It was necessary that the Master should correct this misconception in the minds of His disciples.
- They must be taught that the **Son of man** (the Messiah) would suffer and die, but after three days rise again.⁶

- **So here is where I attempt to make all of this historical background and education relevant for us today and I will pose it as a few questions for us to consider;**
- **Why exactly** did Jesus suffer and die?
- **What exactly** about Jesus threatened some people so much to the point of murdering him?
- **Was it just this idea** of Jesus referring to himself as the Son of Man?
- For after all; the Son of Man language seemed to erupt controversy back then and still today; mainly because scholars did not necessarily know or could agree what Jesus was trying to name.

⁶ Wesleyan Commentary

- My thoughts are that since the “Son of Man” appears 81 times in the Bible; it must be pretty significant!⁷
- Therefore, I am comfortable with naming that the Son of Man as being interchangeable with Son of God;
- This is because the Son of God language, declares that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine; both which threatened people.
- So with this knowledge, was Jesus to be killed because of this claim of him being God?
- Or is there more to why Jesus threatened some so much to the point of death?
- For **the heart to heart** that I believe we are beginning to see implied in our story today, was that it wasn't just the fact that Jesus was claiming to be God that was problematic for some.
- On the contrary, **it was Jesus as God; denouncing marginalization and promoting inclusion that posed the bigger threat I would suspect.**

⁷ Wikipedia

- For when Jesus said as plain as day where little exegesis was needed in Luke 4: 18-19 *He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour* ;
- A message that was also prophesied in Isaiah 61:1-2;
- My **heart to heart** revelation is that if Jesus as God, was **deconstructing an ideology** that was against this message of inclusion;
- **It becomes more obvious** why the powers that be, had to silence Jesus **and silence him indefinitely**;
- For think about it; **it can be difficult** to uphold an oppressive government as the Roman government was; if God came to the scene to denounce it.
- **It can be difficult to** keep people marginalized and oppressed, if the message from God started to take root in the hearts of the oppressed;
- **Causing them to** challenge the status quo;
- **Causing them to** upset the power base of systemic oppression;

- This is something that the powers that be, simply could not risk occurring!
- **Fast forwarding today, this message of inclusion, sadly has caused a political uproar even in our world and churches today;**
- For the blood shed on the cross did not end with Jesus;
- It continued and carried onto leaders such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; Medgar Evers; William Lewis Moore **a white postman from Baltimore**, who was shot and killed during a one-man march against segregation. Moore had planned to deliver a letter to the governor of Mississippi urging an end to intolerance and many others;⁸ and the list of lives lost in the name of inclusion goes on.
- You see for me Church, **the bloodshed continues** and it has transformed and evolved as it pertains to Jesus on the cross, from **blood being shed on behalf of our sins; into blood being shed on behalf of our free-**

⁸Civil Rights Memorial article accessed 2/26/21

dom! Freedom for both the oppressed and the oppressor!

- Because as a side note; I don't believe that the oppressor feels free when they are constantly worrying about staying in power!
- I would imagine clamoring to stay on top would be an exhausting job in itself!
- Furthermore Church, the longer I live and the more I look around my community and the world in which we live in; I have stepped into **this new state of awareness**, as it pertains to my faith and my understanding of why Jesus was impaled on the cross.
- I have stepped into this newfound awareness, that the **blood shed continues**; for the black and brown lives who are senselessly killed for the biases attached to our skin color;
- I have come to an awareness that the **blood shed continues**; for women all across the globe who are still marginalized and treated as nothing but objects;
- My eyes are open to this awareness that the **blood shed continues**; for our queer community;

- I cannot dismiss that **The blood shed continues**; for those not native to our American soil;
- **My Christology now acknowledges that the blood shed continues for these reasons and more**; causing me to question any church community, who is not willing to talk about the bloodshed that occurred on the cross that Jesus was nailed to;
- **The Blood shed** for justice;
- **The Blood shed** for mercy;
- **The Blood shed**, that represents all of the lives that have been senselessly removed from this Earth because of some aspect of prejudice, bias, inferiority complex, fear and more.
- **The Blood shed that represents** the beings, that lost their lives, from trying to stop all of this bloodshed that continues to hemorrhage our world.
- Folks the harrowing reality that I feel called to name is that **there is essentially no gospel without the bloodshed**.
- For as strange as it may seem to say what I am about to say even to myself;

- My heart to heart to you as a community of faith and as pursuers of justice, mercy and inclusion for all, is that **the bloodshed matters**;
- For **the bloodshed represents** just how corrupt this system of poverty, oppression and racism really is.
- **The bloodshed represents** just how difficult this commandment of what it means to love God and love neighbor really is for some.
- **This bloodshed is an indication** of just what is at stake for the unseen and discarded lives that have been tossed aside like trash at the curb.
- **The blood shed is a powerful symbolism** to tell the world to wake up;
- For the kingdom of God is hemorrhaging!
 - **Shifting gears so that I can lead us to some sort of resolution for now; for this is an ongoing dialogue where one sermon cannot save the world;**
- One of the author's that I read; J. Philip Wogaman in his article *Speaking the Truth in Love; Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World*, lifted up regarding this topic of sys-

temic oppression and marginalization and the need for reconciliation and repair;

- He shared, “To put it differently, if you think of the issue as a matter of skin color, then you have announced to yourself that the only thing important about you is your own skin color; there is nothing in you deeper than that. That is dehumanization. And of course, in retrospect, we know that such profound dishonesties infected our whole culture.”
- So to summarize this; if you think that I am just up here talking about the color of one’s skin, then perhaps the heart of this message has not landed the way in which I had hoped.
- So my heart to heart to you as your spiritual leader, is that if you and I hope to do the great task of this **reconciling mission of inclusion for all people**;
- we must dive deeper; beyond the dishonesties that we all tend to speak in our hearts; **dishonesties that tend to** normalize oppression and marginalization;

- We must go deeper, beyond the **Dishonesties that allow us** to trivialize and or dismiss the cries that are shouting in our periphery for liberation;
- We have to go deeper, beyond the **Dishonesties that allow us to be able** to escape the bloodshed that cries out for justice, mercy and inclusion for all people.
- So no, I do not particularly enjoy the sight of blood or mention of it for that matter as it pertains to the Gospel or anywhere for that matter!
- However, my inability or perhaps some of your inability to tolerate these images, should not stop us from recognizing and owning **the fact that the bloodshed keeps happening.**
- **The bloodshed keeps happening;** because the hatred keeps happening.
- **The bloodshed keeps happening** because of some of our unwillingness to go deeper to why this war of oppression and marginalization **keeps happening.**
- **The bloodshed of racism** and oppression **keeps happening;** trying to drown out the gospel that is meant for all people;

- So the prayer for us to hopefully embody, is for you and I to go deeper;
- **Go deeper** in our dialogue with one another;
- **Go deeper** even if there is some discomfort in doing so;
- For the wounds of racism, systemic oppression and marginalization is a wound that **runs deep**;
- **So we must go deeper** until we can stop this bleeding at its source.
- Our work is not done until we identify the source for why this type of evil keeps happening.
- We must see the gospel **not just from the lens of redemption**; for this is not the full gospel;
- We must now expand our understanding of the work that Jesus has done **from the lens of liberation**; so that we all may experience the fullness of life on Earth as it is eternally in heaven!
- **So we must go deeper.**
- **We must go deeper** in our studies;
- **We must go deeper** in our worship; as it is designed to share the marginalized reality, struggle and hope in the

reconciling mission of Jesus; that will hopefully create a path of restoration, healing, recovery and transformation;

- **Our dancer Olivia this morning who danced to the song I Trust You; by James Fortune;**
- Although this may not be a song familiar to this worship context;
- I submit that for us to learn to live out the reconciling statement we are declaring as a community;

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-
- **We must go deeper** in our prayer lives as we continue to ask God to enlarge and widen our worldview.
- **We must go deeper** and discover what it means to serve in a way that might present healing for people's wounded souls.

- Perhaps this is the first step towards how we take up the cross that Jesus is inviting us carry;
- **Going deeper by being willing to forfeit** some of our embedded ideologies and upbringings that may conflict with the heart of Jesus message of inclusion;
- **Going deeper by being willing to let go** and lose some of what we may have; to ensure that others have enough;
- **Going deeper by being willing to step out** of our comfort zones; so that we can step out into the periphery and restore some of our blindspots;
- **Going deeper by completely submersing** ourselves in the work of the reconciling mission and repair; until the hemorrhaging of the broken and downtrodden ceases;
- ***For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.***