

“You’re never too young or too old” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
February 25, 2018 Second Sunday in Lent
Genesis 17:1-7,15-16

Let us pray together: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

Did you notice when I read this scripture that Abram was 99 years old when God changed his name to Abraham? How did you react to hearing that number? Was your reaction a ‘wow’ or was it my goodness, 99? Was it ‘I hope I’m that vital at 99’? Whatever your reaction, you probably measured Abraham’s age against yours. You may have a long way to go to 99 years of age. Or you may be closing in on 99.

The whole story of Abraham’s and Sarah’s lives is recorded in Genesis. Let’s just call them by their new names, Abraham and his wife Sarah to keep things consistent. When we read their story, we realize that Abraham had been following God’s direction for a number of years before he ever reached 99 years of age. God first called Abraham when he was 75 years old. At that time in his life, God told Abraham to leave his homeland and journey to a land God would show him. Abraham didn’t know where God would lead him, he just packed up his household, left his extended family, and followed what God had told him to do.

God led Abraham from Haran, where he had been living, to Hebron in Canaan. It was there that Ishmael was born when Abraham was 86 years old. Ishmael was the son Abraham had with Sarah’s Egyptian slave girl.

The story continues in today’s scripture. God meets with 99 year old Abraham and tells him again he and his wife, Sarah will have a son and the son is to be named Isaac. Abraham was 99 years old. Did he believe God? I didn’t read verse 17. Let me read it to you now: **Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”**

Whether you are a male or a female, would you fall on your face and laugh to yourself if God told you that you would have a son at the age of 99? Some of you hope to reach 99 and here God is telling Abraham that he and Sarah will have a child, a son. A son to carry on the family name and to inherit Abraham and Sarah’s wealth.

Abraham travelled many miles at God’s direction. Abraham had done as God directed and Abraham flourished. He became quite a wealthy man. But now God tells him something he just can’t seem to believe. The thought of having a child at 99 or 100 seems impossible, so preposterous that all Abraham can do is laugh.

What would you do if God asked you to move someplace, but didn’t tell you where? What would you do if God told you that something would happen that you thought impossible? Are you ready to answer God’s call at your age? Young or old. Or do you

think you're too old and the younger members of the congregation should take over for you? You're not too old and you still have much to offer!

Consider this story about Mrs. Bertha Lamb, a 90-year-old widow from Old Orchard Beach, Main. One day she received a letter from the U.S. Navy asking her to sign up for active duty. Her vision impaired, and unable to walk without a cane, she nevertheless felt honored that Uncle Sam needed her. With that great attitude, Bertha Lamb still had much to offer Uncle Sam!

When Michelangelo was 80, he was met by a friend in front of St. Peter's in Rome. The friend asked him, "Where are you going?" Michelangelo replied: "I am going to learn." Michelangelo still had much to offer. He died at age 88 while working on completing St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. He never stopped serving and creating.

Abraham lived to be 175. He had three quarters of a century to live and teach and influence his son Isaac. He had 75 more years to apply what he had learned, to live into the fulness God had given him. Are you doing the same?

There's much truth to the African saying: When an old person dies, a library burns down – meaning a mind with lots of knowledge is lost.

How are you using your 'library' to serve God at your young age? No one here is 99 yet that I'm aware of!

I think there's a lesson for all of us in this story of Abraham and Sarah. You're never too young or too old to change, to take a new direction - to follow God's direction for your life. Abraham and Sarah were not the only people that had to leave home to become who they were called to be. You can probably name missionary folks who left a peaceful life to spread the Gospel in what was often difficult situations. What is God asking you to do today? Are you listening?

God can use you no matter the life you've lived, the mistakes you've made, the regrets you have. No excuses allowed. God used Abraham and Sarah despite their mistakes and faults. When Abraham and Sarah moved to Egypt because of a drought, Abraham told Sarah to tell the Pharaoh that she was a sister. He said this so the Egyptians wouldn't kill him, so they could have his wife. Abraham and Sarah initially doubted God's promise of a son so Sarah had Abraham sleep with her slave so there would be a son – just in case God didn't come through.

God used Abraham and Sarah even though they were less than perfect. God can use you and me. No excuses accepted. When God calls, answer.

If you're familiar with the Tolkien novels, you may relate to what Gandalf tells Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* about the circumstances that come our way in our lives. "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." God gives us something to do. All we have to do is use our time to do God's will.

What would have happened if Abraham had just told God to get lost, that he was tired of moving around and just wanted to be settled and not be bothered?

Let's look at God's covenant with Abraham. What would we have lost? The covenant God makes with Abraham was for all people. God tells Abraham the covenant will make him the ancestor of a multitude of nations. By saying 'yes' to God, Abraham became the father of three world religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. That's a lot to lose.

God's covenant wasn't just with Abraham. Did you notice that Sarah had promises in it as well? Verse 16 from today's reading: **"I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."** God makes it clear that we are blessed through Sarah as well as Abraham. King David, the greatest king in Hebrew history, was an ancestor of Sarah. That's a lot to lose.

Perhaps the most important result of God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah – something none of us would want to lose - is that God's covenant was an everlasting covenant. You and I are a part of the future generations that benefitted from that everlasting covenant. Jesus was a descendant of Abraham and Sarah. Through Jesus we know God and can know salvation and life eternal.

What's the take-away for today? It's never too late to respond to God's direction in your life. Each of us has been and continues to be blessed by God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah. Now, we carry on the blessing to the next generation – no matter your age.

May God bless your every effort.