

Sermon Genesis 17 1 7 15 16 2nd Sunday in Lent Series B

Sermon: 2nd Sunday in Lent

Text: Genesis 17:1-17, 15-16 (vv. 3-5)

Theme: A new name

Goal: God gives us a new name at our baptism and He renews His covenant daily through forgiveness by faith in Jesus

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Two babies are expected to be born in our congregation this year (as far as I know... It is still time to plan some more...) Parents and the entire family and friends become excited with this news! A big challenge is to choose the name of the baby: Shall it bear the name of one of the forefathers? Do you think about the meaning of the name when you choose it for your children? The name given by God to the promised son of Abraham and Sarah was Isaac, which means: He laughs – a reference to Abraham's and Sarah's temporary unbelief when they both laughed as God announced them that they would have a child in spite of their old age.

I – Abraham and Sarah's names

The first time God called Abraham he was 75 years old and Sarah 65. God gave him the threefold promise, as I mentioned it last Sunday: 1) Abraham would have a son from Sarah and his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. 2) His descendants would conquer the land of their enemies, the Promised Land; 3) through Abraham's offspring all nations on earth would be blessed – a reference to the Messiah/Christ. – The promises were repeated again and again.

Abraham was now 99 years old and Sarah 89. 24 years had passed and they still didn't have a child. God came again and renew His promise. According to all human expectation, there was no chance

for them to have a baby. Sarah had been barren all her life and she was now too old to conceive a child. *God comes with what had to sound like the same tired old promise. “You will be the father of many nations”, but Abraham did not really want many nations at that point; he just wanted one son, one child to call his own* (Phil Brandt).

Abraham could think only “inside the box”, only according to his human experience. And he laughed. Maybe he was tired of waiting. The promise had been repeated so many times... and nothing had happened... *There is not much Abraham can do about that, but God can. God calls him to a life of faithful waiting, but also some faithful doing... Abraham’s limited vision did not limit God. God acted despite the limitations of Abraham. Do we perhaps need to simply proclaim this God, stand back, and watch what He does?* (Phil Brandt).

Faith asks us to think “outside the box”. The angel said to Virgin Mary: “For nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Jesus said to His disciples, talking about ‘Who can be saved?’: “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (Luke 18:27). Think only on your own experiences: How many “impossible” things happened in your life?

God came to Abraham this time to renew the promise once again: “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and I will greatly increase your number.” He would come once again before the child would be born

(in chapter 18). But this time something very special happened: God changed the names of Abram and Sarai and instituted the circumcision as a visible sign of the covenant.

God gave a new name to His friends. Abram means “exalted father”. It was changed to Abraham, which means “father of many”. Sarai was changed to Sarah. Both names mean “princess”, but the change of their names was signaling that a new era was to begin. *The renaming stressed that she was to be mother of nations and kings*

and thus to serve the Lord's purpose (CSSB 31). And we know that God's promises were accomplished: Isaac was born (against all human odds); the descendants of Abraham multiplied as the stars in the sky and conquered the Promised Land; and the most important offspring of Abraham is Jesus, through whom all nations on earth are blessed - even we now!

II – Our name

We received a name when we were born and were registered at Home Affairs. This name was confirmed when we were baptized. You know that in the past it was no Home Affairs. The names were given at the Baptism of the infant and registered in the church's books.

I inherited the Devotional Book of my grandfather. He immigrated to Brazil in 1912. He wrote the Family Register on the first pages of this Book. It's worthy to read how he registered each child in this Book. I will try to translate it literally from German: *On 11th November 1899 a daughter was born to us in the Colony Dorofienka, who was baptized by Pastor Barth and received in the Holy Baptism the name of Martha. Godparents: Andreas Koehle and Wilhelmine Winterle.* – Notice the importance of the Baptism for Grandpa Adolph! The name came at least, and two references to Baptism are made, plus the Godparents' name.

Our name is precious to God. God says through Isaiah: “You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow” (Isaiah 62:2). “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1). “I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hand” (Isaiah 49:15,16).

Jesus assured to His disciples: “Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). – And Jesus promises a reward to the faithful in Revelation: “I will give him a white stone with a new name on it” (Rev 2:17); “I will never blot

our his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and His angels” (Rev 3:5); “I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem... and I will also write on him my new name” (Rev 3:12).

The covenant between God and us was done at our Baptism. God declared to be our God and us His children. When we were baptized “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”, this is our spiritual surname. And our name was written in God’s Book of Life. This covenant is renewed daily when God forgives our sins. The Lord’s Prayer, taught by Jesus to be prayed every day, stresses these two realities when it says: “Our Father who art in heaven...Forgive us our trespasses...”

Conclusion: A quotation to finalize: *...sometimes the miracles babies like Isaac are born, but the promise of God is that this is not the way it will always be. If I believe that today, what does that mean for me? ...Faith is this marvellous relationship with God in which he is God and I am creature, beloved and cherished, but he stays God, and I stay the limited and impotent creature. There is a marvellous peace that comes from that faith. I don’t have to solve all the problems, but I can live as they are solved, as if that cross really did make a difference, a difference I know that one day I will see... In fact the Christian life is a better life and blessed in Christ in countless ways. While the measurements of the world may tell us otherwise, the hope which infuses our lives through this faith of Jesus changes everything. I never face a foe which is bigger than my Saviour. It is true that the Christian life sometimes involves suffering, and I may not understand it, but I can trust that God has me and my best interests in mind all the time. Even when I am confused, he never is, and that is a very good thing.* (Phil Brandt). Amen.