

SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 28, 2021

TEXT: GENESIS 17: 1-7, 15-16

THEME: A NEW IDENTITY

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, **2** that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” **3** Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, **4** “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. **5** No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. **6** I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. **7** And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. **15** And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. **16** I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” **17** Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

In the name of Jesus:

You don't find a great deal of laughter in the Bible. In this chapter of the book of Genesis, it is filled with laughter. To set the scene, Sarah is well past the child bearing years, she is in her nineties. Abraham is on the other side of one hundred. The Angel of the Lord tells both of them that the stork is on the way and that after all of this time, they are going to have a baby! A baby! The long awaited baby!

And their response? Usually when someone is told that they are going to have a baby, there is much joy and anticipation! But with Abraham and Sarah, their response is that they fell on the floor laughing. The Bible says that “Abraham fell on his face,” and Sarah stood cackling outside of the tent, tears of laughter rolling down her face, essentially hiding behind the door of the tent so that the Angel wouldn’t think of her being rude in His presence. And so what do you suppose they named the baby when he finally arrived? They named him Isaac, which means laughter. They called their baby Laughter.

But this announcement by the Angel was no laughing matter. This birth of this baby was serious business, the fulfillment of the promise God gave to Abraham that he would have many descendants and that all of the world would be blessed through him. That could only happen if Abraham and Sarah had a baby. They laughed, but God had the last laugh, for His will was going to be done. So Sarah and Abraham told them that they had better get ready and dip into their pensions to prepare for this grand event.

This would be new ground for Abraham and Sarah. They would have new responsibilities, and as fitting the situation, God would give them new names and a new identity. Sarai, would now be called princess, and Abram,

which meant father would now be called Abraham, meaning father of many nations.

God would do this, God would give them this new identity and fulfill His promises to them and through them. For just as the Lord promised a Savior to Adam and Eve, so now He promises that the Savior would come through the lineage of Abraham. God made this promise and God would keep His promise. In spite of Abraham's doubt, his unbelief, his laughter at God's promise, God would bring it to fruition. God not only made this promise to Abraham, He repeated the promise, twice, to emphasize that He alone would do it. Even in Abraham's old age, God would be faithful and keep His promises. This promise would not just be a materialistic promise, that God would bless Abraham in this life, this promise as God says would be "an everlasting promise," one that will endure forever. Kings would come from Abraham's lineage, but the greatest King, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Himself would be born as the Descendant from Abraham, who will bring everlasting blessings through His reign.

Abraham and Sarah would certainly have their own share of heartaches even after their identity and name change. Abraham would be circumcised as a visible sign that God would keep His promise to send a Savior by the seed of

Abraham. But at that moment when the Angel told them that God was going to fulfill His promise to them and do great things in and through them, it dawned on them that their wildest dreams hadn't been even half wild enough.

Dear friend, God has given to you a new identity and along with this identity you have been given a new name. Your new identity and your new name doesn't reflect who you are. For you, like Abraham and Sarah, sometimes take God and His Word for granted. Your faith is feeble and you doubt God is at work in your life. You see the reality of your situation, the hurt in your life, the broken dreams and the unfilled promises made by others. You like Abraham and Sarah have had your share of hardships, doubts, and despair. You look at your life and you see that you have not loved God as you should, you haven't served your neighbor as you ought. There have been times in your life where you have lived as if you mattered most and God didn't exist.

But God's love and faithfulness shown to Abraham is also shown to you. For Abraham's Descendant, Jesus, was born for you. The covenant God made is that by the perfectly led life of Jesus, His shed blood and His death on the cross, and by His resurrection from the dead, you are now the forgiven forever child of God. God doesn't count your sins against you. He is not out to get

you. God is for you. He is on your side. He loves you with an everlasting love. And nothing in heaven or on earth will ever change the fact that you belong to Him.

As a sign of His love, He has given to you a new identity in Baptism. And in Baptism He has given to you a new name. This is what God does and continues to do throughout the Old and New Testaments, and still today. In the book of Genesis, when Jacob was wrestling with God, God gave Jacob a new name, one that goes along with his new identity. In the New Testament, God took a man who hated Christ and gave him a new name and a new identity. That man, Saul, was blinded on the road to Damascus, until he was given his sight again in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Once baptized into Christ, Saul became a new person, with a new identity, one who formerly hated Jesus, now He is changed by Baptism, given a new name, changing from Saul to Paul, and with this new name and new identity he no longer seeks to persecute the Church but seeks to love Jesus and to serve Him the rest of his life.

So too, in Baptism, God has given to you a new name. Christian. You belong to Christ. For if anyone is baptized in Christ that person has become a new creation, the old has passed away, you have become God's new person in

Christ. You have a new name and a new identity, for in Baptism it is not a matter of who you are but whose you are. You belong to Jesus, and nothing will separate you from His love.

You have a new identity in Jesus. So what does that mean? As the Bible says: “**6** Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, **7** rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Don’t conform your life to the emptiness of what the world offers. Instead, seek to be filled in Christ. “**10** you have been filled in him, having been buried with him in baptism, now made alive together with him.” (Col. 2). “**12** Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, **13** bearing with one another forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you. **14** And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

God has given to you a new identity. You have been marked with the cross of Christ. And so our identity as one who belongs to Christ is to put on Christ, to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him. Jesus lived and died and rose again to make you His own, so that you may not only belong to

Him, but live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him all the days of your life. To the glory of God and in Jesus' name. Amen