“The Galactic View”

A Sermon for Bread For The World Sunday

by The Rev. Rachel Wildman

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Bedford MA

March 20th, 2020

Have any of you ever searched for your house on GoogleEarth? The entry screen places you way out in space, and from that perspective, reveals planet earth in front of you—the entire blue and green sphere draped in wisps of clouds. When you put your address in, the view steadily zooms in, getting narrower and narrower, taking you on the most epic of aerial experiences. Continents giving way to countries…countries then giving way to states…states then giving way to counties, giving way to towns, giving way to your street…and finally, your house.

The journey from outer space to home is rather breathtaking. It always fills me with wonder that our universe is so very vast, and yet such specificity exists within it. There is something profoundly spiritual for me each time I let GoogleEarth plunge me from galaxy to my little yellow house. Given the number of arguments that occur in my household related to technology, I am annoyed that God can speak to me even within the likes of Google but so it is.

Our scripture today offers us the same epic and awe-inspiring experience.

Last week we heard the story of Adam and Eve and their temptation by the serpent in the Garden of Eden. That story is one of humanity’s origin stories—about our most elemental beginnings. As one commentator put it, it is about our “primeval history”[[1]](#footnote-1), rather than our specific history. It commnets on humanity’s relationship with God from the perpsective of “outer space”.

This week, we arrive at the turning point of the Book of Genesis, where we get to experience the biblical version of GoogleEarth. We zoom in from the expansiveness of the Garden of Eden and the origins of human ethical conscience, narrower and narrower and narrower until we see clearly one point in history… then one set of fields….then one family…then one man—Abram.

This one man and his family, like many of ours, is at a point of great uncertainty. As one commentator summarizes what has come before the part of the story we hear in today’s passage, “The author [of Genesis] reports [Abram’s father’s death], [his family’s] uncompleted journey to Canaan, the death of [his brother], the barrenness of [his] wife, and an orphaned [nephew] (Lot).” [[2]](#footnote-2)

Gloriously, though, it was in the midst of this uncertainty that God’s word entered. Abram is stalled in the desert, having attempted to make it to Canaan but suffering so much loss on the way, and it is here, in the center of not only the mess of his family but the mess of God’s entire creation—so far from God’s original intentions for it[[3]](#footnote-3)--that God speaks to Abram.

And what does God speak? A promise… a promise of abundance and blessing…and not only for him, but for ‘all the families of the earth.’ The satellite camera angle zooms brilliantly back out, widening and widening in a wonder-filled arc in which blessing is promised to the whole human family.

This promise is relational, though…as are all things with God. It is not a promise that God can keep without Abram’s collaboration. The bright future of a great nation settled safely in its own land, where blessing abounds is only possible if Abram will participate in mediating that promise. God tells Abram that his part is to go with God….To leave the current anxious, depleting uncertainty for a different kind of uncertainty…a hopeful and inspiring uncertainty of journeying with God as together, they transform the circumstances not just of Abram’s family, but of all the families of the earth.

And you know what? Abram goes. The experience of that cosmic promise, the camera zooming back out—giving Abram a wider and wider perspective spanning space and time…. to that magnificent galactic view…was so divinely breathtaking that Abram went.

Just as for Abram’s family, there is so much uncertainty. Our own families face illness and aging and addiction and fractured relationships and…and…and…. And our entire human family, well, uncertainty abounds there, too. Just take the fact that I can’t come within 6 feet of you today for fear of giving you the corona virus! But also--our planet is suffering and responding with the violence of wind and water and fire. Our democracies are fractured, the crack between sides so wide at times to seem impossible to bridge. Our phones and watches and even our appliances are so very smart that they are re-weaving not only the threads of our social connections but the threads of our brains, too. The haves are receiving more and more while the have-nots are growing in number, and forced to live on less and less.

But, we are inheritants of the galaxy-view promise of blessing that was given to Abram so very long ago. And the Lord has invited us to go, too. God still has a dream, a vision, a promise of a land of abundance for God’s most wondrous creation, and our humanity, made in God’s image. And even more wondrous, that dream still seeks…in fact, *requires*, our participation. God desires us not just as *followers*, but as *partners*.

The invitation to go with God comes in myriad forms. For *some* of us, it is an invitation to go to treatment or therapy, to go to a more supportive environment or community or relationship, even to go back to school.

For *all* of us, it is an invitation to go into those places where our brothers and sisters are suffering, to go listen, to go comfort, to go share our abundance, even to go leverage our own power.

Today is Bread Sunday…a day in which we are invited to go with God to those places where our brothers and sisters are hungry….We are invited to go pray and to go sing and to go eat holy bread together, that we might re-member God’s glorious dream. And then….we will be invited to go write…to go with God to leverage the strength that gathering together and sharing Jesus’ meal will give us, to advocate for God’s promise by writing to our senators and representatives calling for the blessing of abundant nourishment for ‘all the families of the earth.’

It may be out of our comfort zones to write…going with God always is. Or, it may not fit in our schedule for today…going with God rarely does. But, rest assured, should we be able to wrest the time for it, it will zoom us further out to where the dream of God’s abundance begins to come into inspiring, galactic view.

*“The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing…and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

*So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.”*

Thanks be to God for that. AMEN.

1. New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: Book of Genesis by Terence E. Fretheim. Abingdon Press, 1994, p. 417. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid, p. 422. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This idea of the whole creation being far from its original divine intention is that of Fretheim, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)