

## A SIGN OF INNOCENCE

Today, we have two stories about people in the midst of a pivotal experience in their lives.

Jesus' journey was taking a turn towards Jerusalem, and his ministry and purpose was becoming more serious and focused.

The Genesis passage presents the occasion when Abraham and Sarah's life journey would take a radical new turn.

Important moments, to be sure, and they are included in the Bible / retained for us because of the importance of the lessons presented.

*It is always good to ask, "Why is this story being told / Why was it included in the Bible?"*

The man known as Abram was told by God that he would be the founder of a great Nation – that he was going to be the beginning of something wonderful and big.

That prediction is a huge burden,... and to make matters worse, time was running out. Abram was 99 years old.

Abram tried to make it happen on his own, but that wasn't God's plan, nor was / is it God's way.

God again appeared to Abram, and God identified God's self, and said, "Walk before me and..... be blameless"

God reminded Abram that he would be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

Abram is likely thinking, "Ya right... whatever..... it's beyond me."

And, that is a good way to begin a new journey with God.

Then God, demonstrated the new beginning by renaming Abram.

Names are given to new things, such as at birth.

This was a new birth.

After some details about this new covenant with Abraham, and some information about God's uncomfortable expectation for all the men of this "new nation"..... Thankfully, we didn't read that section....

*It was a bit too .... well..... moving on...*

God then informed Abraham that his wife Sarai,... is a part of this new birth,... and her new name is Sarah. Moreover, she will give birth to Abraham's son. Sarah was 90 years old.

Verse 17 states, "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who will be 100 years old? Can Sarah who is 99 years old bear a child?'"

Abraham laughed! ..... which means he was contemplating that outcome. He engaged in the thought of it. He didn't dismiss it.

He laughed..... and no wonder,.... it had probably been a very long time since,.....they..... well..... you know what.

Abraham laughed..... and in the next chapter, Sarah was informed about what was going to happen,..... and she laughed, too.

And God told them to name their son, the beginning of this new great nation..... Isaac,.... which means "laughter."

An appropriate name, yet ....How could this be? How could this happen, and how was Abraham and Sarah able to believe..... / to go along with God's plan?

The proposal was way beyond reasonable; it wasn't realistic.

How were they able to trust God,..... and go along with it?

The Mark passage does not contain laughter, yet the essence of the message is similar.

In the previous verses, Peter had just asserted that Jesus was the Messiah.

Then, Jesus proceeds to describe himself in the role of the Suffering Servant.

The Scriptures presented different models for the messiah, one was the suffering servant who would suffer and be rejected.

Another was a mighty saviour who with supernatural powers would rescue the people.

Likely, because of the miracles Peter had witnessed and his own desires, he was hoping Jesus was a conquering saviour messiah.

The suffering servant was not in his reality / beyond rational possibilities. It didn't make sense to him,..... so he pulled Jesus aside in order to stop Jesus portraying himself in such a way.

In turn Jesus rebuked Peter,.... and don't be alarmed by Jesus calling him Satan. Satan merely means opponent, and not the personification of evil.

Jesus told Peter his mind was not in line with Jesus'. His thoughts were constrained too / obsessed with human limitations.

Jesus then turns to the crowd, and for Peter's sake, too, proclaims that if .. Anyone wants to be a follower, then they must ....

– Deny themselves.....

– Take up THEIR cross and follow... Jesus.

Deny, take up one's own cross, and follow Jesus are not three demands, but rather.... THREE Step..... in that order.

Deny self is to drop the self image. To reject the current way of thinking.

The cross symbolizes some of the hard work involved,... more specifically: being / living in conflict with popular culture.

The cross is the consequences of breaking human rules—breaking free.

Once the old self is discarded and a person accepts the risks and hazards, then..... following Jesus is possible.

Jesus expands this further by noting winning at the human, non-divine game of life – success as culture defines it,..... is really losing.

And,..... all that success or wealth cannot buy salvation.

No ransom / no payment buys salvation.

The similarities between the two stories / the parallels are:

Deny self..... peeling away all the rubbish and old luggage renders one, ultimately..... leaves a person clean and innocent as a child.

In other words,..... Blameless,..... as God told Abraham.

The cross is the work..... is the risk. It is investing self in the divine vision. And then, the following can happen.

Blameless..... We often get stuck on this first step.

God told Abraham to be blameless.....

It is one thing to begin living without blame, but that doesn't erase by transgressions / past blame.

Blameless suggests innocent..... “be innocent”.

Innocent is having no shame, .... and living without the torture of guilt, and it means NOT being a victim, and therefore possessing no reason to blame others.

Innocent – no shame and no blame.

The concept of innocence prompts the image of a child,... a child that dwells in a safe and loving environment. A child who knows no abuse, but only experiences love, nurture and support.

An innocent child can dream.... because anything is possible.

An innocent child can risk and explore..... because a loving parent is watching over,..... all will be okay.

Innocence basks in love..... responds to love..... is drawn to love, and wants to love and be loved.

Yet sadly,..... the world can be harsh.

Some parents are not so loving,.....and many other things can steal innocence including, peer pressure,.... the demand to surrender to popular culture, the rules of society's game,..... and evil things happen.

All these afflictions, and many others, can cause deep wounds.... that can steal innocence.... .. And, the loss of innocence is the withdrawal from love – especially the sense of self love / self worth.

When innocence dies,..... love is hard to embrace,... and usually the shame forces the self condemned to hide from love,..... to put up walls, to pretend to be something / someone else ....to take on a facade.

In the case of Adam and Eve, it meant covering themselves and attempting to hide from God .... from love.

Once innocence is gone,.... then a person is no longer good enough / worthy of love and acceptance..... So status, money, good clothes, make up and other cover-ups are required..... because there is shame and blame.....because who could possibly love and accept the true, transparent self.

Nevertheless,..... deep down inside each one of us, under all the scars / all the hurt and shame,..... lives a tender, innocent child..... yearning to be free ..... to be loved and to love.

Jesus said, “Deny” / reject that old way of thinking. ... peel away and discard the lies that have been told to each one of us.

Deny the reality / the rules that control the NON-divine domain.

God said to Abraham,.. .. Grasp / take on blamelessness. ....

Let that innocent child out so that you can accept the dream / the vision that God has for you.

Granted,..... it is an oversimplification to suggest that a person can instantly shed years of abuse / that one can so easily get free of shame and blaming others.

Discarding / overcoming abuse..... ending the victim role can take years or... a moment.

The weight of feeling shame,... the weight of blaming others / the burden of being Unworthy ..... is very heavy indeed.

Freeing the innocent child is not easy, yet even so,. The path away from being a victim / of living in shame is a journey of grasping love and being able to trust again.

To say it differently,..... the healing process is learning to accept grace.

We all know that it is very difficult to get free of the curse of blame and shame....  
And if we can't get free of shame / denying the old garbage, then we tend to regard our religious  
"salvation" as payment / a ransom... ..that declares,.. "I'm still guilty / not worthy of love and  
acceptance, yet... I've got my ticket .... thanks to Jesus. So,... everybody must regard in good  
light,.... even though I feel dark inside.

In the hymn, "Amazing Grace", the self confessed "wretch" is past tense. It is the old way of  
thinking / of seeing self.

Jesus told Peter to stop thinking in a non-divine manner.  
God is love, and God's way of understanding / of being is not rational as we humans define it,....  
It is love.

Moreover, we can't get there by thinking our way through the mess.  
Shame and blame is not cast off by mere determination.

It is a hard journey, and we must..... feel our way to healing ... to innocence,... inch by inch ... by  
learning to love and be loved.

Jesus calls us to deny self / our old tarnished self image.  
God invites us to let go.  
Love invites us to love.....

The path to Innocence is marked by a yield sign.... that prompts us to "yield" / to surrender the  
old to God..... to venture down the path that Jesus took..... in confidence because we are with  
God / with love.. Loved.

Innocence / blameless..... is the state of being loved regardless.  
It is ceasing to do destruction that blame and shame caused us to do,.. And it is knowing that  
once upon a time,... and deep down in side lives an innocent child ... that is loved and  
comfortably loves self.

Have you ever noticed that children love to sing out loud?  
A sign of innocence is singing out loud.

Another sign of innocence is laughing ..... laughing at the insanity the world constructs /  
laughing at the vision that God has for us,..... as we following in step behind Christ.....

We can laugh because we love, including ourselves, and we are loved,...and we know that love  
conquers all.

The message for today is: God sees the innocent child within us, and God says to the child,  
"Let's go for a walk. I have a surprise for you. Trust me." And, the innocent child laughs and  
says, "Sure, I'd love to."