



DATE: Sept. 20, 2020 (16th Sun. after Pentecost)
SCRIPTURE: Exodus 15:1-6
TITLE: God's promise to Abram.

Many of us have experienced a “bait and switch,” and it doesn’t feel good. In the retail world “bait and switch” happens when an incredible deal for one item gets customers into the door, only to find that item is no longer in stock, but lesser deals are available.

“Bait and switch” happens in relationships too. In the early days, this person is romantic, thoughtful, and considerate. In time though, and often after commitments have been made, the person switches into a selfish, inconsiderate alternative to the person you met.

In this passage Abram wonders if he has entered into a covenant with a “bait and switch” God.

Walter Brueggemann, the preeminent scholar of the Old Testament, says that this passage, “is pivotal for the Abrahamic tradition. Theologically, it is probably the most important chapter of this entire collection.”

The reason he deems this passage so important is that it is the beginning of a dialog between God and Abram. God has made several promises to Abram already. The promise is first stated in Gen. 12:1-3, when God promises to make Abram a great nation, and that he will be blessed to be a blessing to the world.

The promise is reiterated in Gen. 13:16, when God says to Abram, “I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth. If someone could count the bits of dust on the earth, then they could also count your descendants.”

Today’s passage is a turning point because it is the first time that Abram’s response to God is not simply silent obedience. Abram begins to question God. Instead of silent acceptance, Abram has a question that is loaded with frustration and doubt.

Chapter 14 tells a brief story of warring city-states in and around Canaan. In the midst of these wars, Abram has a rightful claim to great reward, but turns it down in favor of remaining faithful to God. It is here, after Abram has turned away the spoils of war, that God tells Abram that he will give him a great reward.

Here is my translation of Abram’s response, “I don’t want any reward but what you have already promised me. You told me my descendants would be great, and I have none. *All I want is what you have already promised.*”

Abram feels like God is trying a “bait and switch,” offering one reward, but then switching it to something else. And this is the Father of our faith. This is the foundation upon which our relationship with God is built. It is a relationship marked by question, dialog, and struggle. Abraham’s grandson eventually will be renamed “Struggles with God.”

God is not a “bait and switch” God, and we cannot be a “bait and switch” Church. We are evidence of God’s promise to Abram, and reveal the good news of God’s blessing through our kindness, mercy, and justice.

God reassures Abram by telling him that his descendants would be as many as the stars. I want to remind you that you and I are two of those stars. We are Abrams descendants. We are the evidence of God’s promise to Abram.

We are called to live as evidence of God’s promises. Abram was promised to be blessed to be a blessing to the world. We, the Church, are to continue that blessing to the world. God had good news for Abram. The Church is both evidence and witness to that good news to the world. The Good News of the Church must not be a “bait and switch” gospel that promises love and grace but offers exclusion and judgment; or a gospel that promises peace and the Kingdom of God, but offers only ‘niceness’ and ‘comfort.’ God is not a “bait and switch God.” We must not be a “bait and switch” people. Instead, we reveal the good news of God’s blessing through the ways we show kindness, compassion, grace, and justice.

We live out God’s promise to Abram as evidence and witnesses to the blessing. Abram’s descendants would number the stars. You and I are two of them, blessed to be a blessing to the world.