

Genesis 17:1-7,15-16

Trusting God when we don't understand

God makes a covenant with Abram, in which Abram and his wife Sarai (both in their nineties), will become the ancestors of many nations and peoples, including their leaders, and an example of great faith. They are renamed Abraham and Sarah and promised the birth of a son – this is a great blessing because they had not previously been able to have children.



Bible notes



The story of Abram—who-becomes Abraham provides us with the origins of the people of God, the people of whom we, many centuries later, are a part. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave his home, family and country to set out for a land 'that I will show you', with the promise of being made a great nation.

Over the ensuing chapters, Abram travels and adventures at God's direction, and the promise is clarified: Abram, who is both elderly and currently childless, will have descendants as numerous as the stars. Today's reading from chapter 17 concentrates the promise into a covenant, a formal agreement between God and Abram, with responsibilities on either side. Abram is to follow God – this is his side of the covenant. In response, God will give Abram many descendants. Unlike the covenant made with Noah (see last week), this covenant entails both relationship and choice.

God then expands on this covenant: Abram's descendants will include nations and kings, and they will be given land (v.8). As a sign of this covenant, Abram and his household and descendants must be circumcised (vv.9–14) – a common practice, given a new significance. For future generations, performing circumcision at eight days old makes clear that the child has done nothing to earn their place in the covenant, it is all down to God. This is grace.

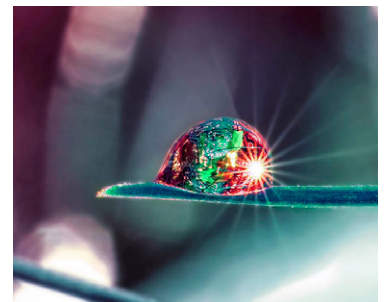
The changing of names, from Abram ('exalted ancestor') to Abraham ('father of a multitude'), and from Sarai ('quarrelsome') to Sarah ('princess'), is a demonstration of trust. Names, back then, said something about their owners. These name changes are not because of what God has done; they are in anticipation of it. We may not know how God's promises will be kept, but there is a call to choose to believe them nonetheless.

REFLECT

Walk slowly and aimlessly for about 10 to 15 minutes, inside or outside as appropriate. Stop, look, turn round, use all your senses, be aware of what is around you, look closely at things. Make a mental note about things you see or become aware of that you hadn't before, how your perspective has changed – simply by aimless walking. How do you trust God from this changed perspective? What might you do to change your perspective to be more like God's?

First impressions

- What do you think this is?
- How do we respond to seeing things we don't quite understand?
- How can we trust God when we do not fully understand God's ways?



Find out what the image is at the foot of the page

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Incredible God, we thank you and praise you for trusting in us even when we find it hard to trust in you.
We thank you and praise you for offering us more than we could ever imagine.
We thank you and praise you for making the impossible possible.
We thank you and praise you for all the blessings of youth and of age.
We thank you and praise you for everything – in Jesus' name.
Amen.



You will need two people to do this. Read the Genesis story again. One of you plays the role of Abram/

Abraham and the other Sarai/Sarah. Role play a conversation when Abram comes back from meeting God and exploring what has changed, and what the changes might mean for them as a couple and, soon to be, family.



FIND

Look at some old family photos. How many people can you name? Can you identify any 'family' names that have been used in several generations? Do you all know why you were given your own name(s)?

LOOK

Find a telescope, binoculars or a magnifying glass (or even an old pair of spectacles) and see if using them gives you a different perspective or view on what you are looking at. God sees things differently!