

# New Kilpatrick

## Sermon

Genesis 15:1-6

18th September 2016

***Spirit... from stardust to stardust you created the universe... and each of us is a clump of such dust... filled with holy breath... but more than that... filled with promise... May we be inspired with that promise... that intent... that holy breath... so be it... Amen***

I doubt any of us realised how expensive cake has become... the going rate is now £25 million... a year... My hope is that channel four gets some serious indigestion... from soggy bottoms... flat yorkshires... and baked alaska scandals... after stealing Great British Bake-Off from under our noses...

Just when you thought there were still a few things you could hang on to in a world that was fickle and confused... and when all you hear about is Brexit and the US elections... surely there were some things that remained constant... that still made you feel good about the world... but clearly even the foundations of our great British TV habits and indeed our entire culture... have crumbled... Bake-Off is off to Channel 4... and Wednesday evenings are never going to be the same again...

I am quite certain Abram was no baker... he wouldn't have known a dampfnudel from a hazelnut babka... and probably none of us did until the last few weeks... but what we do have in common with the great patriarch... is that feeling when you realise... the foundations of how you understand the world... have just changed... That which has been just so... for so long... turns out to be not so certain any longer...

Abram is 75 years old... old enough to have had a large family... but he hasn't... and it is a concern... so much so he has taken a slave... as his heir... You see... having children was vital if you wished to have eternal life... for there was no concept of life after death... or the idea of heaven in Abrams time... you continued through your name... through your offspring... and that continuation... was your eternity... and without anyone to remember... your line came to an end...

But Abram was determined that wasn't going to happen to him... so a slave was chosen...

But the story goes... God had other ideas... as God often does when human plans are made...

The Jewish sage Rashi interprets what happened next like this... Abram says to God... "I see in my stars that I am not destined to have children"... and God takes Abram outside and says to him... "Look up... Leave behind your astrological magic... The stars have no influence on you... except to be used to count your off-spring"... i.e. don't believe in fate or chance... I'm giving you the invitation to believe in... and live by... promise... you'll have a nations of children...

And all Abram once expected to happen... collapses as quickly as a bake-off ginger bread show stopper...

Now this is a big thing... to believe in a promise... so much so it is mentioned at least four times in this one story of Abram... his children... (and remember he is being told this when he is 75)... will be as many as the dust of the earth and the stars of the sky...

Yet... here's the thing... he's given that promise when he is three quarters of a century old... and he has to live with it... for another quarter of a century... because it isn't until he's almost 100 before it is fulfilled...

Can you imagine him when he is 80... or 90... or 99... Still the stars are there every night... goading the memory of that night... but still it is only a rumour in his ear...

And what's more... he's called Abram... 'Abram' means mighty father... but his name is changed to Abraham... which is bigger... 'father of many nations'... It is as if everything is laughing at him... for the stars and his name point him towards something huge... yet none of it is happening...

What must it be like... to live under a promise?...

We think we know... We think we know what it is like... because we've had Brexit... and look what happened to those promises... We think we know... because even though most of us here are not Americans... we feel we know the candidates of the US election better than our own MPs... and look at their promises... of walls and arms...

Promises are what they used to be... like NHS funding... they aren't worth the bus they are painted across... We know Abraham... we know what it is like...

But actually... we don't know... we don't have the patience of the patriarch... we don't have the faith of Abraham... we don't have the tenacity and vision of the one whose promise this is...

Because Abraham... recognises... real promises... covenantal promises... are made to be fulfilled in future generations... You hold on to it... live it... not for self... but for those yet to come...

Living under a promise... is possibly the least selfish way to live... because you aren't living for self... you aren't hearing these promises like election manifestos... and expecting them to be fulfilled to make *your* life better... but as a way to live hopefully... towards future generations...

Certainly we sometimes in familiar ways... but the promises we like to hear are the ones that are quickly fulfilled... fewer migrants... taking back control...

Faith promises are far bigger... and a whole lot less selfish... Divine promises... are not fulfilled immediately... The biblical drama of Abraham... waiting quarter of a century for this promise... offers insight into what faith is...

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks... writes... Faith is the ability to live with delay without losing trust in the promise... to experience disappointment without losing hope... to know the road between the real and the ideal is long... and yet be willing to undertake the journey...

It is beyond ourselves... Living with promise is like a great arc that makes us curators and story tellers... called to keep the promise alive... for a generation yet to come... It is a singularly unselfish act...

On Thursday last week we started our Heritage Forum... I was late... and I came in during a time when a whole lot of people were telling stories of things they did... or work they were involved in... that explored and brought to notice events and people and actions of our heritage... And there was a wee... or big... insight into faith... of keeping the story

alive... not for self... but for those yet to come... It was an act of promise-keeping... of living under the promise... to love the future... and hand on to those who will be our future... even at cost today... for the time whenever that will be... when the promise is fulfilment... Giving of self now... curating the promise... for the time beyond this generation... when the promise will come real...

As Abram lived then... between star charts and promise... so too do we... never sure how God's promise will be fulfilled in this or any generation... This is not rash... but part of our DNA... It is how we live... it is how we think... as faith people... living into the long term... caring here... for the promise... working and dreaming here... not for ourselves... but within the great arc of promise... living faithfully... for those we do not know... and for whom... we keep the promise of God... alive...

#### References

Kathryn M. Schifferdecker Commentary Genesis 15  
[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2980](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2980)

Jonathan Sacks Covenant & Conversation: Genesis