

Trust

Genesis 15 v 1-12, 17-18

Lk 13 v 31-35

How easy do you find it to believe that good things will happen? Is that easy for you to do, or do you find it hard? For some of you, you may have good things to look forward to—a new grandchild, an upcoming celebration, a new job that you've always wanted. For others it's more difficult—there may be medical treatment coming up that you are dreading, a difficult decision to face or a change that you don't want. And for some there may be neither something to look forward to, or anything in particular to dread—but instead the same old, same old; the usual routine, getting up, going out, going to bed.

Psychologists reckon that our ability to trust is based on our experiences of childhood. So if we have had a secure childhood, they say, our ability to trust is big, whereas if our experience of childhood is less secure, so is our trust level. I don't think its as simple as that-I think personality and life experience all have an impact on us, and things beyond our control can impact us. If we have had a poor experience of friendship groups, for example, it might be quite hard to trust new people.

But what I think is a basic thing that we all tend to do, is to look back on what's happened in the past. And this is what Abram is doing here. He and Sarai had, for years, longed for a child,

particularly as children were regarded as a sign, to the Israelite people, of God's blessing. And it hadn't happened for them. As some of you probably know, myself and my husband were unable to have children; and for many years we mourned. It's not something you can't have-it's a loss. And you get on with your life, but there's always something missing, in the background, it seems. And I imagine this would have been how it was with Abram and Sarai. Except that for them, God kept promising them a child. Which would have meant that they did not adapt to a life without a child, but kept longing for one.

What did this do for their trust? I find it interesting to look back in the Bible at the levels of trust,

or none trust, that Abram had. God promised him that he will be blessed with a great nation. With this blessing in mind, Abram left his country and kindred. He must have had huge levels of trust, at the age of 75, to follow God's plan and go to the land God had promised him.

But he didn't trust God enough to protect him from the Egyptians, and instead hatched his own plan, telling his wife to lie and say she was his sister. He then, in effect, sold her to Pharaoh, receiving sheep, slaves and donkeys in return. Bet that was really nice for Sarai!!! But this wasn't what God wanted. The plan backfired, God sent a plague on Pharaoh's house- and Abram and Sarai were sent on their way.

God promises Abram again that he and his people will inherit all the land they see, and they will have ‘offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth; your offspring can also be counted.’ (Gen 13 v 16).

Abram’s nephew was taken captive, and Abram defeated those who had taken him, offering thanks to God for his release.

And then God promises him again, this time in a vision. “I am your shield, your reward will be very great.”

Now, do you notice how many times God repeats His promise to Abram? I would suggest that this is because He knows Abram is doubting.

You don't have to repeat a promise if somebody trusts you to do the deed, do you? So Abram, who became Abraham, first patriarch of the Jewish and Christian faith, known for His act of faith and trust in the near sacrifice of his son Issac, did not have total trust for the whole of his journey with God. There were times when he didn't trust God. And this doubt is what is conveyed here-'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless.'

Abram is doing what all of us would do- base our expectations for the future on our life experiences of the past. He is 75 years of age and has never had children. Having descendants that will be more than the stars of the sky, does not seem likely.

And I think for all of us our trust in God can be shaken when our trust in life isn't sound.

So what can we learn from all this? Well, firstly, be honest. Sometimes, I think our respect for God can prevent us being honest with Him. But this wasn't always the case. If you read some of the psalms, people there are communicating their anger with God. Not only that but they were blaming Him for their misfortune. Now I don't agree that God brings misfortune on people- but I think the psalms are an important reminder that a relationship with God should be a close one-close enough to be able to be honest with our emotions.

Abram argued with God in this passage. He more or less said, 'I don't believe you.' Perhaps if we are honest with God, it's the first step to gaining trust for Him. Even saying the words, "I don't believe you," is saying you believe *in* Him, otherwise you are talking to yourself!!

Secondly, if we look at our central belief-that the Son of God claimed victory over death but first had to die brutally on a cross-then I think that's enough to show us that trust in God is complicated. If I asked you to draw 'Love', in a picture, there's very few who would draw a crucifixion. Yet God loved the world so much that He sent His son to die on a cross. The crucifixion, I think, makes us realise that pain and grief are part of God's story.

I believe that God understands us fully, because He knows what it is to lose a child. He understands grief. And He understands what that does to us.

Our journey with God might not turn out the way we expect. Life doesn't suddenly become wonderful the moment you become a Christian. Sometimes it seems wonderful, because, I think, you are given the ability to see it as God sees it, with love. But God is not a fairy godmother, and won't always respond to prayer in the way you expect. We don't always get everything we like. And things don't always happen in the time scale we want.

But today's psalm says, 'though war should rise up against me, yet I will put my trust in him.' (psalm 27). What this is saying is not that trust in God will dispel the war, but that we trust in God *despite* the war.

And God is steadfast. The covenant with Abraham is a life time commitment, and when I say life time, I mean a commitment to all of the lives who have a relationship with God. He has a life time commitment with us. That means He will never give up on us. He will never stop loving us. He will not leave us when things get tough. Even if you don't pray, He's still there. He knows what you are thinking before you think it. Steadfast love through everything. And even beyond death.

In the passage in Luke, Jesus weeps for Jerusalem. He longs to protect the people, like a hen and her chicks, but the city is not willing. Trust doesn't come from looking on from afar, from being distant and polite. It doesn't come from expecting everything to be perfect. It comes from being honest, accepting the world as it is, and getting close, really close to God. Are we willing to come under Christ's wings, to remain close to him. Amen.