

**‘Look at the Stars!’ – Rev. Jennifer Adams**  
**February 28, 2010 – Lent 2C**

What if one of the primary images of God that we carried around in our hearts came from the story of Abraham that we just heard from the book of Genesis? What if we thought of God as the One who wakes us in the night, invites us out into the darkness, shows us the stars and tells us that our potential is as numerous and vast as those tiny, far away seeming lights. What if we thought of God as the One who showed us our practically limitless ability to touch the world with some kind of grace?

Now I think I have this whole ‘image of God thing’ on the brain because our speaker last Monday, Jaco Hamman, Professor of Pastoral Theology at Western Seminary talked to us about grief and the need to lament and he told us that how we approach these issues is influenced by our family of origin (no surprise there) and by our theology, how we think about God. He explained that part of why grieving is so hard for many of us is because most of our families didn’t do it very openly and our theologies didn’t necessarily pave the way for healthy sorrow either. And where we come from, the patterns we’ve learned and how we think about God effect not only our process of grieving but almost everything we do. Inside of us live old patterns and deeply seeded beliefs that effect how we relate to just about everything that comes our way. Now there are Lenten sermons to be had on lament and I’ll get to that, I promise in a couple of weeks, but today it’s the theology I want to go after. I want us to be conscious of the God images we carry and how that effects how go about our faith and our lives.

And so as I read the lessons for the week, I wondered about letting God be the God from this slice of the book of Genesis. Because the image it offers isn’t that common and adding it to our inner sense of the divine might help us, broaden us, challenge us, strengthen us for the journey. So let’s give it a try.

Now this wasn’t Abraham’s first encounter with God. In fact part of why Abraham was out there in a tent fighting one battle after another is because God told him that the land of Canaan would eventually be his, the north and south and east and west of it would belong to his family forever. And when Abraham was told this he believed God and so he defended and lived on the land. But at this point in the story, the part we heard today it wasn’t playing out quite like Abraham thought it would. He was at least 80 years old, exhausted from the battles against the kings from the north, and he didn’t yet have one full descendent to help populate this land that God had given him. And so, as faithful as Abraham was, it was all beginning to feel a little ridiculous – sure there was the land sure but it was constantly getting sacked so how could he know for sure it would be theirs forever - and besides that who was he going to pass it on to – his family was hardly worthy of nation status it was just Abraham and his wife Sarah who were by all common knowledge beyond child bearing years. And so at this point in the story, as faithful a soul as Abraham was, he had some major questions and probably even had some significant doubts, wondering just whether or not God was with him at all. And it’s in the darkness of night, in the midst of that wondering that Goad came, to Abraham’s tent, in the night and took him outside and showed him the sky and told Abraham not to worry, that his descendents would number the stars. And the land would be theirs. And in this slice of this story that’s who God was. It’s an image to consider taking along.

And so what if we thought about God that way? My guess is we have pretty firmly somewhere inside of us God as Creator, God as judge, God as commandment-giver, sovereign, Almighty Lord. But what about God as the One who reveals our potential and shows us what can be done through us? What about God as the one who takes us out under the stars and reminds us, each of us and the collective us that we are virtually unlimited in the ways in which we can touch this world with some sort of grace? Now our grace might not be about numbers of descendents like it was for Abraham, but I'd bet that it's about something. So leave your tent for a minute or two step and step out into the darkness; look up into the sky, and know that like the endlessness of the stars you can produce something maybe as simple as a sky-full of kindnesses, or a sky-full of songs, or lots and lots of compassionate presence, or meals so numerous that won't even be able to keep track of how many people you feed along the way. And as Grace Church what if we looked up into the sky, noticed heavenly the lights and believed that we could touch that many lives with the good news of Christ, we could plant that many seeds of hope in this world, we could welcome that many strangers, free that many captives, feed that many hungry people?

Now it might not all happen tomorrow. Remember how long Abraham and Sarah had to hang in there. This is about God's time, not ours. But over the course of your life, over the course of the life of Grace Church these kinds of things could happen. What if God is One who shows us the stars and says that we have endless gifts to give? Step out of your tent this week and look at the sky. Wonder at the limitlessness of it all and then know that through you, and through us that's how much grace can be done.

Amen