**Being Obedient like Abraham**

*The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.*

***2****“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.****3****I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

***4****So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.****5****He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Genesis 12:1-5*

This is only the beginning. Abram was part of a nomadic people; they were used to wandering from place to place as they found pasture for their animals. But it always strikes me as remarkable that from what the Bible tells us Abram, at the age of 75, just upped and moved on when he knew God was telling him to, he was obedient to the call of God.

**Q. Do you ever feel that your age or other circumstances get in the way of what you feel God is calling you to do?**

At the start of our account he is still called Abram. His story continues from Genesis chapter 12 through to Genesis chapter 25. It is worth reading through, he had a long life, a lot happened and he made some questionable decisions but Abraham, as he becomes in chapter 17, remains faithful and obedient to God and finds that God can fulfil even the most unbelievable of promises.

Despite God’s promise to make him into a great nation, Abram remained childless until the age of 86 at which point his first son was born. The mother of this son was not Abram’s wife Sarai but her maidservant Hagar who then ran away from the ill treatment she received at Sarai’s hands. (Genesis 16)

**Q. The treatment of Hagar is perhaps one example of how things were different in Abram’s time but, as we recognise the abuse of power that is going on here, could we ask ourselves whether we are ever in positions of power over others and how we use that power? Does our own obedience to God lead us to treat others with greater love and kindness than we might otherwise?**

Abram and Sarai’s treatment of Hagar was a result of their own decision not something God had told them to do. It could be argued that they should have been more patient in waiting for God to fulfil his promises but that does not take away from the value of Ishmael, Hagar’s son, and his descendants.

In Genesis chapter 17 we can read:

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.****2****Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”* ***3****Abram fell facedown, and God said to him,****4****“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations.****5****No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.****6****I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.****7****I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. Genesis 17:3-7*

The promise has gone from Abram becoming a great nation to him becoming the father of many nations. This is reflected in the name change from Abram which means ‘exalted father’ to Abraham which means ‘father of many’. This is also the point where circumcision is introduced as a practice.

Genesis gives us a picture of Abraham having a special relationship with God. When, in chapter 18, God shares with Abraham what he plans to do to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham tries to persuade God to change his mind. Eventually, as Abraham bargains him down, God agrees not to destroy Sodom if just ten righteous people can be found there. In the end Sodom is destroyed but God intervenes first to rescue Abraham’s nephew Lot and as many of his family who will go with him.

Abraham and Sarah became parents to their son Isaac, we are told, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was in her 90s. We can only imagine how precious their long-awaited child was to them. But, when a few years later Abraham heard a command from God to give up this son, we may not be able to begin to imagine how it made him feel. This really tested Abraham’s obedience. We can read in Genesis chapter 22 of how Abraham took his son Isaac, with enough wood to build a fire in order to make a burnt offering, to a mountain which God told him about. Along the way Isaac asks his Dad where the lamb for the burnt offering is. Abraham responds, ‘God himself will provide the lamb…’. Right up until the last moment Abraham follows what he believes God is calling him to do. He reaches out his knife to kill his son and as he does so, God intervenes.

***11****But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”*

*“Here I am,” he replied.*

***12****“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*

***13****Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.****14****So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”*

***15****The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time****16****and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,****17****I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Genesis 22:11-17*

The people of Israel, as we can read elsewhere in the Bible (check out John 8:31-41) put great significance in having Abraham as their ancestor. Paul writes of believers becoming children of Abraham by faith (Romans 4:13-25). Abraham is an important character for our faith and also for the other Abrahamic faiths of Judaism and Islam. The Bible does not suggest that Abraham was perfect, he certainly made mistakes, but we do see in him someone who trusts God and does what he believes God is telling him to do.

**Q. Abraham had conversations with God which led him to follow particular courses of action. Do we have a sense of God leading or calling us to do certain things? How have you found yourself following God’s call?**

**Q. Abraham’s apparent willingness to sacrifice his son feels shocking. Have we ever felt that God is calling us to do something which we really do not want to do? Is obedience a word which we would apply to our own approach to faith?**

**Q. As we reflect on Abraham’s apparent willingness to offer his son and the impact that would have had on him (and Sarah who does not seem to be aware of what is happening), does it help us to reflect once more on the sacrifice which God makes of his son on our behalf?**