



CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL

WEEKLY UPDATE

February 24, 2021

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 8

UCJCI 42nd SYNOD THEME 2021 – **Rooted, Resilient: Responding in HOPE** (Health, Opportunity, Peace, Evangelism)

Rooting Our Emotional Health in God Brings Us Hope

by Rev. Otto Menko

Please read Genesis 17:1-7. 15-17

This year the UCJCI begins a new Synodical period and for the the next two years will be guided in its ministry and mission by a new theme, “**Rooted and Resilient: Responding in HOPE**”.

The word ‘hope’ in this theme serves as an acronym for ‘**Health, Opportunities, Peace, and Evangelism**’. Each of these four words highlight an important aspect of our Christian existence. During this first quarter of the year, from January till the end of March we have been focusing on the fact that rooting our physical, emotional and spiritual health in God brings us hope. Today’s message, based on Genesis 17:1-7.15-17, addresses the importance of rooting our emotional health in God.

Genesis 17 and previous chapters tell us about the promise God gave to Abraham, making him the ancestor of a great nation. This great nation would become God’s chosen people whom God would use to reach out to the entire world. To this call and promise, Abraham responded in faith. What stands out in these passages are God’s choice and timing. We might wonder why God chose someone from Mesopotamia or why is the Land of Canaan the Promised Land? But most importantly, why did God choose Abraham, who was an old man by any standard? At that time, he was already 75 years old, his wife Sarah 66 and in addition to that, they were childless. Why didn’t God choose a couple in the prime of their youth, strong and healthy, full of energy, with hopes and dreams, and at the beginning of their married life to forge a future together?

To have a deeper appreciation and understanding of what is going on with Abraham, let us consider a few things.

1. Taking into account the average life expectancy at that time, Abraham and Sarah were fortunate to reach such an old age. With no health care, and other, social, institutional safety nets that we take for granted these days, not to mention the little value placed on human life, and the constant presence of wars and violence, there weren’t many who lived to see old age. Reaching that age was an exception and not typical.

2. As an elderly couple, what would they have looked forward to? What more would they have expected from life? Sure, in an existential sense they were safe, they were well off, but that in itself doesn’t lend meaning and purpose to life. It is most likely that as an elderly couple they were slowly winding down, making peace with accepting the inevitable.

3. By middle-eastern social standards, Abraham and Sarah very likely got married at an early age, possibly in their early or mid-teen years, consequently, at the time of God’s call and promise they had been married for over 50 years. In addition to that, they had no children. Just imagine it. Each month and each year was a chronicle of yearning and pain, an ever-repeating cycle of anticipation and disappointment, the ongoing hope for a child, and the shedding tears, struggling perhaps with a sense of worthlessness, inferiority in a world where childlessness also meant social ostracism. Throughout history, in most cultures, being infertile was not only a personal pain but also a social stigma. The Bible is filled with stories of women battling infertility like Sarah, such as Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth, and about the additional pain couples experienced along the way in the form of taunting, rubbing it in, or being shunned.

This serves as the background for God’s call and promises to Abraham. Their story is like a book full of disappointments, sorrows, and resignation, but suddenly, unexpectedly, before the end, a new chapter opens which is filled with not merely the possibility but the assurance of realizing long-lost hopes and dreams. It is the best thing ever that could have happened to them. No wonder, they have grabbed God’s promise with both hands. They had nothing to lose, but gain all they ever hoped for and much more!

So, they embarked on a journey of faith and obedience, but things didn’t turn out as they had expected. The years were passing by, one after another and nothing happened. Finally, 11 long years after God’s promise, Sarah couldn’t wait any longer for God to act. In desperation, she took matters into her own hands and became a mother through a slave of hers, named Hagar, who acted as a surrogate. This move of withdrawing their trust in God, of course, created a host of unnecessary problems and conflicts which they had to live with for another 13 years! By the time Abraham turned 99 and Sarah 90, their story appears to be the ultimate tragedy. At that point, it was completely impossible for them to conceive and when God reassures them, Abraham could do nothing else but laugh. Yet, a year later Isaac was born, and the rest – as they say – is history.

Thinking through the episodes of Abraham's and Sarah's life as we consider the importance of emotional health, we can't help but sympathize with this man and woman, for their story is also ours in a sense that we too are subjects to a lot of life's joys and sorrows, experiencing a broad range of emotions from feeling happy, relieved, encouraged to feeling anxious, frustrated, angry, or depressed. In all, just like them, we too, go through a lot of emotional highs and lows, good times and bad times in our life.

Having feelings and emotions is part of our human existence, they add to the rich experience of our lives. They all serve a purpose. (Clarification: there is a subtle difference between emotions and feelings. Feelings are experienced consciously, while emotions are usually subconscious and they give rise to specific or a mix of feelings) They are conditioned responses, some of which are hard-wired, others are acquired through our experiences as we encounter and interact with our environment, situations, and other human beings. Abraham and Sarah had to deal with a lifetime of emotional pain, frustration, disappointment, and perhaps even anger, resentment, and resignation.

The problem arises when our emotions, especially the negative ones, overpower us and we are incapable of controlling them. In such cases, we inflict pain on others or upon ourselves by our expressions and actions. Think about how desperate, impatient, and cynical Sarah became over time. Sometimes it is our fault, it is due to our lack of self-control and self-discipline, but there are cases when it is a manifestation of emotional illness or disorder, which is a more complicated matter and often requires professional help of a counselor or even medical intervention. When negative emotions linger too long, we better make an effort to seek help.

However, dealing with our feelings is also a matter of faith. We know from the Scriptures and maybe even from personal experience that nothing is beyond God's power. In all cases, we can reach out to God who knows and understands us better than anyone else, and who can empower us not to fall victim to our weaknesses or circumstances. Psalm 34:18 says, *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* By putting our trust fully in God, we root ourselves in our Creator and Redeemer's goodness, mercy, and love from which real, sustaining, empowering hope springs. This hope, then, gives us the strength and courage to persevere on our journey.

God's choice of selecting a childless elderly couple to become ancestors of a great nation also speaks to God's deep love, to God's attention to the details, concerns, issues, struggles, and pains of our life. There is nothing beyond the scope of God's power!

If you consider it a miracle, that the 90-year-old Sarah became pregnant, 9 months later gave birth to a healthy son, did not die in labor, and lived to see her son growing up, how about an even greater miracle? How about a virgin giving birth to a baby, - Jesus - the Son of the Living God! He came *"to proclaim good news to the poor...to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners"* (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18). He encouraged all saying,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). Even on the cross, He considered the needs of others. He entrusted His anguished, broken-hearted mother to the care of His disciple, John, and also comforted the repentant sinner crucified next to Him with words of hope and assurance.

God truly cares about us with infinite love, passion, and wisdom. Our physical, emotional, and spiritual health is of great importance to God. Remember, God does not want us to suffer unduly. So if you find yourself in a dark place, if you feel overburdened with negative feelings or find it difficult to be in control of your emotions, pray about it, seek God's mind, and please reach out and ask for help from those you trust and who can assist you.

Let us close with the words of the Apostle Paul, who said, *"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."* (Ephesians 3:16-21)



It is a common practice in our congregations to use the 3rd Sunday of the month as Youth Sunday. It is a time when the youth - typically the middle and high schoolers - are in charge of planning and leading the congregation in worship. They are tasked to select the Scripture, the theme, the songs, to lead the service, and bring the message as well.

But why have Youth Sunday? Well, to have it because it is on our calendar is not a good reason at all. We must be intentional about engaging our children and youth. Why? Because they are a part of the community of the congregation - many of them from birth (by baptism or blessing), while others become involved at a later stage - they all are welcomed and embraced by the fellowship and must be looked upon as the next generation of God's people. They are entrusted to our care to provide them with a nurturing, wholesome spiritual and social environment so that they could mature into men and women of faith.

Sometimes we use the phrase 'the children are the future of the church' but maybe we should rephrase this as 'youth is the here and now.' What we do here and now will have a profound impact on the future of our church and broader communities. They need much more than the usual 'teaching' in our classes or meetings held at the church. We must journey with them - one on one - so that they may see firsthand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, how faith undergirds our daily

activities and our entire life. By letting them see 'discipleship in practice' we have a greater chance to help them find their way to Jesus Christ Himself, to salvation and a new life.



Annabella Voaden preaching on the theme, 'God is our Guide' on February 21, 2021 Youth Sunday at John Gray United Church (West Bay.)

UNITED CHURCH IN JAMAICA AND THE CAYMAN ISLANDS
CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL

CHILDREN & YOUTH SYNOICAL RALLY!

SUNDAY,
MARCH 28, 2021
Savannah United Church
5:00pm to 7:00pm
Refreshments will be provided

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 27. (Saturday)
Lay Leaders Certificate Course Day 2 – "Introduction to Leadership" - 9:00am – 4:00pm – via Zoom
Girls' Brigade Tea Party – 3:30pm (see flyer)

February 28. (Sunday) 2nd Sunday of Lent

"Mentoring is the cultivation of [children and] young adults, the tender caring for and nurturing of them so that they will grow, flourish, and be fruitful."
Jeff Myers,

SPARKLE & SHINE

It's Tea Party time
Join us for
The 12th Annual
**GIRLS' BRIGADE
TEA PARTY**

Saturday, February 27th, 2021
3:30pm
Audrey & Handel Whittaker's Residence
1237 Frank Sound Rd., North Side

Tickets \$10

on Radio Cayman 89.9
every Sunday at 7:45 am

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