

## The Reverend Marjo Anderson

Reading for Revised Common Lectionary – Semi-Continuous – Pentecost 4 28 June 2020  
Genesis 22:1-14 Salem, Bridgeport

### “Abraham’s Axioms”

**It’s never too late to do something great.**

It had been a good night.

His wife and employees had thrown him a party for his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The party was long over and everyone else had gone to bed – except for him.

He had decided to go for a walk.

Looking back on the last 75 years, he couldn’t complain.

He had married the woman he loved

& at age 65 she was beautiful enough that he was still afraid another man might steal her away.

His career had been amazingly successful and they had had everything they wanted – everything – except for a child.

Oh, he could have taken another wife for that purpose,

but that would have hurt Sarai and he could never do that.

But that was why he was feeling so melancholy now.

All he had achieved, all he had gained, all that he had acquired,

what did it mean when you had no children to whom you could pass it on?

Sure, he could leave it to his manager, his right-hand man, his friend,

and that would be a good thing, but no one would ever remember Abram.

What impact had his life had on the world?

What significance had it had in the great scheme of things?

What difference did any of it make?

He was no more important than a grain of sand.

It was then that he heard The Voice – the voice he instinctively knew was the voice of God.

The Voice said, “**It’s not too late to do something great**, you know.

If you pack up everything you own and follow where I lead, I will take you to a new land and I will make you the father of many nations;

your descendants will be as many as the grains of sand in the desert.”

“Where’s the land?” “What kind of land is it?” “How long will it take me to get there?” Abram asked.

The Voice didn’t answer a single question.

All it said was “Believe in my promise. Trust and obey. And follow wherever I lead.”

So at age 75, Abram packed up everything he owned – his wife, his servants, his belongings – and set out to BEGIN the life God had planned for him.

At age 75, he BEGAN a new adventure, a new journey.

At age 75, he BEGAN to pursue a brand new dream.

**It's never too late to do something great.**

But to do something truly great,  
something that impacts the world,  
something that has great significance in the whole scheme of things,  
something that leaves a lasting legacy –  
requires a human-divine partnership.

**It's not just God; it's not just you; it's partnership work and that takes two.**

I believe in a God with unlimited power but I also recognize that God's power is limited.  
Let me say that again: I believe in a God with unlimited power but I also recognize that God's power is limited.

Anyone know what I'm getting at? Or do you just think I'm out of my mind? Don't answer that! ;)

In case it's too early in the day for riddles, let me explain:

The creator of the universe, the maker of all things, the source of all that is, has unlimited power.

HOWEVER...in order to give human beings free choice,

God gave up the power to control human beings, and so when it comes to free choice, God does not interfere.

If God wanted to make of Abraham and Sarah a great nation, God would need their cooperation.

Under the law of free choice, God could not do this thing alone.

Neither could Abraham & Sarah do it alone.

Not only could they not control history over the generations it would take for their descendants to become a great nation,

those 2 could not even take the 1<sup>st</sup> step, couldn't even get out of the starting gate, couldn't even have a single child.

If God wanted to make of them a great nation, God would need to help. They could not do this thing alone.

**It's not just God; it's not just you; it's partnership work and that takes two.**

But here's the tricky part: it's NOT an equal partnership. It can't be. Because we are human and God is God.

So think of it this way:

**Our dreams are important, but just part of the story. God is the author and God gets the glory.**

We are created to live in partnership with God - but it is NOT an equal partnership.

God has made it clear from the get-go that we are to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and body.

We are to listen and obey. We are to trust and follow.  
But that's exactly what we rebel against.

From the very first we have thought we knew better than God, we have disobeyed God, we have been our own god.

Abraham was 75 when God promised him descendants.

10 years later when they were still waiting, Abraham and Sarah decided to take things into their own hands.

Sarah gave her handmaid Hagar to Abraham so that he could father a child through her.

And he did. Hagar bore Abraham a child, a boy they named Ishmael.

God's response was, "Why did you do that?"

I'm the author of this story! You are merely the characters! It's not up to you to determine the plot!"

But as our own author, Rich Lansing, can tell you, sometimes characters take on a life of their own,

and then the author can have a dickens of a time getting the story back on track.

That's what Abraham and Sarah did. They tried to take over in the partnership. They overstepped their bounds.

And in so doing they created future problems for themselves down the road.

13 years later Sarah has a child, a son named Isaac, and then all of the sudden Hagar and Ishmael are no longer needed.

They are expendable, worthless, and actually a potential threat, so Sarah asks Abraham to make them go away.

And in a horrendous, heartless, hateful act, Hagar and Ishmael are sent out into the desert to die.

At this point, it became clear to God that Abraham might not have what it took to be the father of many nations.

After just 10 years he and Sarah had taken things into their own hands,  
creating something which was not part of God's plan.

Then 20 years after that, they again had taken things into their own hands to get rid of the very thing they created.

But God decides to give Abraham one more chance. God puts him to the test. God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

Abraham must be aware but if he doesn't pass this test this partnership with God will be an end,  
because what else could have driven him to even contemplate such an action?

God asks Abraham to sacrifice the person most dear to him, the thing he had wanted all his life,  
the thing he had gone on this journey to win, the thing that guaranteed his legacy,  
the thing that God had promised him – his only son, his purpose, his future, his dream.

In the end God doesn't require the sacrifice. And that's interesting.

Abraham left home with Isaac and Abraham returned home with Isaac, so on the surface nothing has changed.

But in reality everything has changed.

Everything has changed because in the end Abraham was willing to trust God enough to give up what was most important to him – not only his beloved son, not only his purpose in life, not only his dream,

but the very thing that God had promised him.

And it's only because Abraham was willing to do that God was able to make him the father of many nations.

**It's never too late to do something great.**

God can even now do something amazing with your life and with mine.

God can even now do something amazing with Salem.

But here's the thing. We can't do this great thing on our own. Only God can do this great thing in us.

**It's not just God, it's not just you. It's partnership work and that takes two.**

But it is not an equal partnership.

**Our dreams are important, but just part of the story. God is the author and God gets the glory.**

God can only do a great thing in us

when we stop trying to hold onto all the other things we love and are willing to let them go.

God can only do a great thing in us

when we are willing to do what God says even when it is counterintuitive.

God can only do a great thing in us when we are willing to wait until God says it's time.

**It's never too late to do something great.**

As long as we as individuals and as long as we as a congregation are alive,

God can make of us something great.

But only if we work in partnership with God.

**It's not just God, it's not just you. It's partnership work and that takes two.**

It takes two, and it is a partnership, but I am not the only one in partnership with God,

and you are not the only one in partnership with God

and Salem is not the only one in partnership with God.

All that we see is our own little piece of the puzzle;

but God sees all of the pieces and knows how to put them all together.

The dreams that God has planted in each of our hearts are important,

but they are just single strokes of a brush in a painting that spans the universe.

Our job is to hold on to the promises God has made to us

EVEN when it seems that God is about to rip them out of our hands.

Our job is to trust God even when we're not sure we can.

Our job is to relinquish our control and hand control over to God.

**Our dreams are important, but just part of the story. God is the author and God gets the glory.**

What is it that God is calling you to sacrifice today? Your dreams? Desires?

Your property? Possessions? Prosperity? Pride? Power? Privilege? Paternalism?  
Patronage?

Your confidence in your own ability? Your dependence upon your own rational thought?

Your need to be right and make others wrong? Your need to be in control? Your power to make decisions?

Your traditions? Your comfort? Your need to have things the way you want? Your leadership role?

Whatever it is that God is asking you to sacrifice today,

know that when you love God and when you are following God's call,  
you can trust in God's love and power to work everything out for good.

If Abraham had not been willing to do the thing

that went against everything his heart and mind and soul and body told him, and do what God wanted –

as wrong and heartbreaking and illogical and irrational and counterintuitive it seemed –

he would have been as insignificant as a grain of sand in the desert.

But because he was willing to what God asked – even though it made no sense –

God gave him as many descendants as grains of sand in the desert. Through him God changed the world.

This week let's remember "Abraham's Axioms" and see what happens:

**It's never too late to do something great.**

**It's not just God, it's not just you. It's partnership work and that takes two.**

**Our dreams are important but just part of the story. God is the author and God gets the glory.**

Amen? Amen? **Amen!**