

**Week 6, Sunday: The Destruction of Sodom**  
**Genesis 19:1-29**

**For Journaling or Discussing with Another:**

Read Genesis 19:1-11

- In verse 9, we are informed that the townspeople believe the visitors have come in judgment. Recall a time you experienced someone judging you. What was your response?
- The phrase in verse 5, “That we may know them,” is Biblical speech for sex. The townsmen come, “to the last man,” seeking to gang rape the guests. What do you think might be their motivation: lust, anger, intimidation, destruction?
- In verse 8, Lot offers his own daughters to be sexually abused by the crowds. What is going on? What does this say about Lot and about “the lot” of women who lived in that society?
- In verse 11 the townsmen are struck blind. Why do you think rape is still used in places as a tool of war? In what ways are those who would do such a thing already blind?

Read Genesis 19:12-14

- What do you think and/or feel about God’s plan to destroy the city and its inhabitants?
- Given Lot’s actions in offering up his own daughters, how do feel about Lot being offered safety?
- How, if at all, does this story relate to issues of fairness or justice in the world now?

Read Genesis 19:15-23

- In the middle of the drama, Lot pleads for a bit more mercy. He requests that he not have to travel too far, that his way to safety be not too hard. The angels grant his request. Recall a time when you prayed for mercy or ease, whether you deserved it or not?

Read Genesis 19:24-29

- In the aftermath of the destruction Abraham appears; and we are told that Lot and his daughters were spared because of their relationship to Abraham, (“*God remembered Abraham*”). Into our story Christ appears. In Ephesians chapter 1 it is proclaimed that we have been adopted into God’s family through our faith in Jesus Christ. How does your relationship with Christ bless you? From what does he spare you?

Continued blessings engaging Genesis,      Tom Maehl, First Lutheran Church, Waltham, MA

## Week 6, Monday, Origins

**Scripture:** *Now Lot went up out of Zoar and settled in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; so he lived in a cave with his two daughters. And the firstborn said to the younger, 'Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the world. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night; and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. On the next day, the firstborn said to the younger, 'Look, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.' So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger rose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and named him Ben-ammi; he is the ancestor of the Ammonites to this day. (Genesis 19:30-38)*

**Reflection:** In our tradition, we are free from Biblical literalism; that is the requirement to believe that "If the Bible says it, then that is what actually happened." This frees us to separately consider:

- What really happened?
- What is happening in the world of the story?

In the world of the story, sexual misconduct is damaging human relationships. Previously, we were told that the people of Sodom were particularly abusive. Two angels had arrived and had been offered hospitality by Lot. However, the rest of the city understood that the visitors had come to judge them and therefore these guests were viewed as enemies. A crowd had gathered with the intent of using gang rape as a way of destroying their common enemy. Lot responded by offering his own two daughters to the violent mob. Though the daughters are not touched physically, we can surmise that Lot's action abuses them emotionally. Now, in the world of the story, we can see that something of the sin of the father is being visited on the children (Exodus 34:7). The daughter's calculated engagement in incest gives evidence of their now skewed sexuality, their now broken humanity. Sin is spreading and is being passed down!

Apart from the world of the story, we may also wonder what really happened. Maybe it happened as written; but it seems a bit far fetched that there was that much wine in the cave, and that the old father was both sexually capable and simultaneously cognitively oblivious two nights in a row. Maybe what really happened is that the nation of Israel, who would later be drawn into bloody wars with the nations of Moab and Ammon, found that it was easier to justify the killing of these cousins, (and the acquisition of their lands), if they crafted stories of their ancestry that enabled them to be deemed as somehow less than fully human.

Regardless of what really happened, this is a story that in ways repeats. African Slaves in the US were deemed to be three-fifths of a person; and still Jews are deemed to be sub-human by Neo-Nazis. So too, sexual abuse is rampant, damaging human souls and relationships.

**To Ponder:** When have you consciously or unconsciously dehumanized another?  
Or experienced being dehumanized?

**Prayer:** Bring healing to those who have been improperly touched. Bring rescue to those who are in danger of assault this day. Bring transformation to those who would perpetuate abuse. Give strength to those who advocate, counsel, and comfort. Make us more human. Amen.

## Week 6, Tuesday, Repeated Mistakes

**Scripture:** *From there Abraham journeyed towards the region of the Negeb, and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While residing in Gerar as an alien, Abraham said of his wife Sarah, 'She is my sister.' And King Abimelech of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, 'You are about to die because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a married woman.' Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, 'Lord, will you destroy an innocent people? Did he not himself say to me, "She is my sister"?' And she herself said, "He is my brother." I did this in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands.' Then God said to him in the dream, 'Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart; furthermore it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. Now then, return the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all that are yours.'*

*So Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants and told them all these things; and the men were very much afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, 'What have you done to us? How have I sinned against you, that you have brought such great guilt on me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that ought not to be done.' And Abimelech said to Abraham, 'What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?' Abraham said, 'I did it because I thought, There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, "This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother."' ' Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. Abimelech said, 'My land is before you; settle where it pleases you.' To Sarah he said, 'Look, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your exoneration before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.' Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife (Genesis 20:1-18)*

**Reflection:** If this story sounds familiar, it is. They have done this before; out of fear pretended that Sarah is Abraham's sister, putting the promise of descendants at risk (Genesis 12:10-20). They are making the very same mistake! Once again, however, God who is the primary actor in the story intervenes, this time through a dream; and in the end, once again, all is well.

This story may serve as a reminder that we not only make self-serving mistakes, in ways we keep making the *same* self-serving mistakes. Yes, over time hopefully we deepen and grow, transform and change; yet still there is an old sinful creature inside of us (the old Adam, the old Eve) who causes or allows fear, or greed, or ego to replace trust in God. Thanks be to God for forgiving our sins; for working faithfulness and other gifts of the Spirit in us; and for the promise that, in the end, through our connection with the crucified and risen Christ, all shall be well.

**To Ponder:** We too, each one of us in our own way, keep wavering in trust, repeating the same mistakes, then rising again into fruitful life. What do you fear in this moment?

**Prayer:** If you but trust in God to guide you, and place your confidence in him, you'll find him always there beside you to give you hope and strength within; for those who trust God's changeless love build on the rock that will not move.

(text Georg Neumark, tr. Catherine Winkworth)

## Week 6, Wednesday: Birth of Isaac

**Scripture:** *The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' And she said, 'Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'* (Genesis 21:1-7)

**Reflection:** After a quarter-century of waiting, the promised child has finally arrived - Isaac. That Abraham and Sarah are so old, old enough to laugh at their own childbearing, is evidence that the fulfillment of the promise is all God's doing. God has been faithful! God has provided! God has delivered!

Curiously, the passage is remarkably brief. Abraham is a wealthy man; yet there is no report of a huge celebration. Abraham is a religious man; yet there is no report of a formal ritual or sacrifice of thanksgiving. There is so little elaboration. Abraham and Sarah simply name the child, circumcise him on the eighth day as was customary, laugh at the absurdity of being 90 and 100 year old parents, and then the story moves on. Why is this?

Perhaps the birth of Isaac is presented in reserved fashion to remind us that this is not the end of the story, maybe not even the center of the story. Maybe the brevity is meant to teach us that the 25-year journey of waiting, of living in hope that God would come through on God's promises is as important as the promise coming to fruition. That is to say, maybe the journey is as important (or more so) as arriving at the destination; and, of course, the birth of Isaac is not the final destination! The birth of Isaac is a milestone for sure, it ends one phase of Abraham and Sarah's life; but now they are entering another phase where they will continue their life-work of engaging God's calling, God's promises, and the broken and blessed humanity that surrounds them.

**To Ponder:** Where are you on your faith journey? How are you engaging God's calling, God's promises, and the broken and blessed humanity that surrounds you?

**Prayer:** Jesus Savior, pilot me over life's tempestuous sea;  
unknown waves before me roll, hiding rock and treacherous shoal;  
chart and compass come from thee. Jesus, Savior, pilot me.  
(“Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me”, text by Edward Hopper, ELW #755)

## Week 6, Thursday: Family Conflict

**Scripture:** *The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.' The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.'* So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

*When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, 'Do not let me look on the death of the child.' And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.'* Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink..

*God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (Genesis 21:8-21)*

**Reflection:** Yesterday it was noted how the account of the birth of long-awaited Isaac is surprisingly reserved. Here is another possibility of why that might be so. Maybe the complexity of having Ishmael and Hagar there in the home has toned down Abraham and Sarah's response. Maybe, as they were celebrating the birth of Isaac with one part of their being, in another part they were already worrying about the messiness in their family dynamics.

Dealing with complex family dynamics is where we have now moved in the story. Sarah sees Ishmael (Abraham's first-born son) as a threat and there is something like loathing in her reaction to Hagar. Sarah's rejection of Hagar distresses Abraham; nevertheless, he follows Sarah's wishes and expels Hagar and their son. Swirling below the surface are issues of power and standing in these hierarchically related relationships. Notably:

- Ishmael has standing because he is Abraham's first born, but not as much standing as Isaac because of the power difference between their mothers.
- Abraham has more power over Sarah because he is the man in the patriarchal world of the story. However, Sarah has more power over Hagar than Abraham because Hagar is Sarah's personal slave.

Human community has become an entangled web of competing interests. God, however, continues to be faithful. God saves Hagar and Ishmael and includes them as children of the promise.

**To Ponder:** How are the entangled webs of life impacting you this day?

**Prayer:** Bless us, O God, in the midst of life's complexities. Teach us to be good partners with one another, acting with mutual care, sharing power, valuing each person. Amen.

## Week 6, Friday: Leadership

**Scripture:** *At that time Abimelech, with Phicol the commander of his army, said to Abraham, 'God is with you in all that you do; now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have resided as an alien.' And Abraham said, 'I swear it.'*

*When Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized, Abimelech said, 'I do not know who has done this; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.' So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs of the flock. And Abimelech said to Abraham, 'What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?' He said, 'These seven ewe lambs you shall accept from my hand, in order that you may be a witness for me that I dug this well.' Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba; because there both of them swore an oath. When they had made a covenant at Beer-sheba, Abimelech, with Phicol the commander of his army, left and returned to the land of the Philistines. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. And Abraham resided as an alien for many days in the land of the Philistines. (Genesis. 21:22-34)*

**Reflection:** Abimelech is a noble character and a good leader. In a story already littered with despicable human behaviors, like a breath of fresh air here now is a person who acts justly and wisely. He is also perceptive. In saying, “*God is with you in all you do,*” he reveals that he has come to understand that the God is with Abraham in a powerful way.

How is it that Abimelech has come to perceive Abraham's connection to God? Certainly we can surmise that he takes notice of the externals, Abraham is very prosperous. Yet we may also assume that there is something much more internal going on. Back in chapter 20 we learned that God spoke to Abimelech in a dream, and Abimelech was receptive to it. It seems there is a thoughtful, contemplative side to him.

Good leaders still need a combination of gifts that may include bold action and an ability to judge externals; at the same time, some sort of internal thoughtfulness and discernment are also necessary. Abimelech is a good teacher.

**To Ponder:** Who has been an ‘Abimelech’ to you; that is a teacher in how to rightly live and lead?

**Prayer:** Thank you, O God, for giving teachers and guides on our journey. Continue to bless us with ever deeper wisdom and understanding and lead us along right pathways. Amen.