

“Faith in the Stars” Rev. Michele Ward
Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church
August 11, 2019
Genesis 15, Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

I grew up in the San Joaquin Valley in Northern California on 4 acres. Right before I started middle school, my family moved from Modesto, the large suburb where most of my extended family lived, to Oakdale, a foothills town that called itself “The Cowboy Capital of the World.” My family ran a small horse farm outside of the city limits. I remember having days when I felt lonely and uncertain about my new school and making friends. I remember the deafening sound of crickets at night, something I had never heard in the suburbs. The sounds of the trains and cars driving by at night were more familiar to me than the sounds of coyotes and crickets. In the evenings, I would go down the hill from our house to the barn to listen to the horses eat. On walks around the barn at night, with the sky as clear as glass, I would stare up at the sky. On those nights, I could see the stars shining so brightly that they felt close enough to touch. I felt in awe of God’s magnitude in those moments, in awe of the beautiful and vast universe God had created.

I wonder if Abraham and Sarah felt this way as they stared at the stars, recalling the promises that God made to them both about the future of their family and the impact their ancestors would have. I wonder if the stars overwhelmed them, if they felt too incredible to truly be the image of their children and the future of the nations.

Some Hebrew translations lift up Sarah as the one with the faith to conceive, not just Abraham with the faith to believe. And yet, the author of Hebrews lifts up Abraham to us, among others. The author of Hebrews was writing to a group of Christ followers facing severe persecution. The Roman Empire targeted Christians because of the threat they posed to the status quo. They needed to hear stories of the ones who had gone before them.

What do we need from the book of Hebrews right now? The reminder to not give up. To have faith even when the world around us is falling apart and life is hard.

The three-fold office of Christ, according to John Calvin goes like this: Jesus is prophet, priest, and king all wrapped into one. Dr. Dan Allender uses these categories to talk about faith, hope, and love. He aligns each office of Christ to one of those traits. Christ is the main intercessor for us, the one who prays for us, who sits at God's right hand for us, who will not cease to mediate for us. Dr. Allender says that to have faith is to fulfill a priestly role. Each of us does this in our own way.

NASA: "When you look at the stars at night, you are seeing light that may have taken 20 or 30 or even a few hundred years to reach your eyes. You are looking back in time. The distances in the universe are so vast that scientists use the term "light year" to measure them." When we look at the stars, we are looking at the past. We are looking at something that doesn't even exist in the spot where it started years and years ago to get to us. Isn't this something?

Have faith. Live like Dr. Allender reminds us to live--is a full embodiment of our roles as prophets. The reminder to not give up. To have faith even when the world around us is falling apart. Look up. Look up at the stars.