

**“Is God Ashamed?” New London UMC Aug. 7 & 8, 2016 Rev. Joyce Rich
Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Luke 12:32-40; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 *NRSV***

You might have thought that the lazy, hazy, crazy days of Summer would be filled with light and breezy scripture readings – but that is NOT what the Lectionary readings have had in store for us this Summer. There have been some serious looks at: what it means to be a prophet; and some of the hard messages from God that the prophets have had to deliver to God’s people. We’ve also spent time thinking about different forms of freedom; as well as Jesus’ instructions on how to pray. But I think the most challenging scriptures that we’ve seen have been the ones that have forced us to remember that our relationship with God can change. And that it can change not just because we can mature as disciples, or because we can turn away from God to sin some more – but our relationship with God can also change because this is the *Living* God who can react, and respond, and take issue, and mull, and make decisions – and do so quite independently from us. We have been reminded that we have no control over what God chooses to do. I think that’s particularly hard for us to accept because we like to believe that we are the only ‘free agents’ in this relationship – that because we have free will we can decide how this relationship is going to work out. Oddly, we forget that we received our free will from God . . . and that God also has free will! So our relationship with God depends not only on how engaged WE choose to be in it, but also how engaged GOD chooses to be in it. And whether WE like it, or not, there can be times, and reasons, why God may want a little space, or to take a little break, in our relationship. Shocking, isn’t it?! . . . And yet WE are rarely perturbed when we feel we need some space, or when we instigate a little break, in our relationship with God. For some reason we think that God won’t notice if we’re not giving 100% to the relationship; or if we kind of put it on autopilot for awhile. Because if it works for us, why would God mind? . . . Right?

Not right. . . . In our scripture readings today we’re reminded that God is paying attention to our relationship. That God is ‘up’ on what we’re doing – and not doing. That God can see when we’re just going through the motions, and when we’re really whole-heartedly committed to this relationship. It seems that God sees us more clearly than we choose to see ourselves because God is not in denial, or fooled, or blinded by God’s love for us. However God does take love into consideration when determining a just response to us. And Jesus tells us, “Do not be afraid, it is God’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” . . . Ah, and then Jesus goes on to imply that it should be OUR good pleasure to be prepared to accept the gift of God’s heavenly kingdom, instead of being consumed with accumulating more and more earthly stuff. That it is OK to let go of the stuff that we’re not going to need for all eternity, and to shift our focus to opening our hearts to receive the true treasure from God. Because if we use our earthly resources to help one another, and seek to serve others with loving kindness, that can help open up our own awareness of how God is offering heavenly gifts to us with great loving kindness.

Naturally our awareness of God's gifts, and our desire to receive them with open hearts, might happen more fluidly if we could simply SEE God. I know that sounds pretty simplistic. But that seems to be what we're missing. Even if God couldn't be right here with us in all of God's glory – if we could use something like Skype for a moment – to quickly 'read' God's expressions, and body language as God speaks – just think what that small link could do for our relationship with God! It is so hard for us to maintain a relationship with ANYONE without some direct contact – some face time – that provides us with direct feedback and new information to incorporate into our relationship. Some type of contact that assures us that the other person also wants to continue to be in relationship with us. A way to mutually affirm our relationship.

But what we have with God is: the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives and with our prayers; the voice of God's Word in scripture; and Jesus' promise that a place is prepared for us in God's Kingdom. These 'contacts' are what we have in our relationship with God. And either we act on faith, like Abraham did, to believe in the promise, to listen to the scriptures, to rely on the Holy Spirit and move forward without fully seeing God's presence with us – or we falter. If we go over the tipping point and lose faith – we let go of the relationship, and we no longer believe that God is still holding on – because we can't see what God is doing. But if we are just to the tipping point we might still be looking for signs, waiting to see what happens next. The Book of Hebrews tells us, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Which tells me that if we're looking for a way 'out' of our relationship with God – we'll only see the signs that point to the exit, and ignore the ones that point us toward God. But if we're hoping to draw closer to God – than that is the assurance we will receive, and those are the signs that we will see.

Scripture tells us that Abraham was not 100% sure about his relationship with God all 100% of the time. But he had hope and he trusted that what he didn't understand – God could sort out and find a way for Abraham to follow. And then Abraham kept putting one foot in front of the other to keep moving forward in his relationship with God. Abraham is an example of someone who was WILLING to stay in relationship with God – through easy stretches, weird stuff, difficulties, and surprising times. Abraham CHOSE to stay in relationship with God; and he hoped and trusted that God would stay in relationship with Abraham.

In the Book of Hebrews we read that God is not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham. Abraham's faith and trust were not misplaced.

What about our faith and trust? Will God also not be ashamed to be called our God?

Amen.