

biblestudy: october 2018

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury's Adult Bible Study Series

October 7, 2018 Text: Genesis 6:9b-22 “Noah’s Steadfast Faith”

Various translators have found a variety of ways to render the description of Noah in Genesis 6:9b. The Common English Bible says, “Noah was a moral and exemplary man.” The New Revised Standard Version notes “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.” In the King James Bible, the description is “Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations.” The New International Version records “Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time.” How would you like those descriptors on *your* resume!

Contrast Noah with the depiction of the rest of the world: “God saw that the earth was corrupt, because all creatures behaved corruptly on earth” (Genesis 6:12). The chief accusation was that other than Noah and his kin, the entire population had filled the earth with violence (Genesis 6:13).

One thing that challenges me in this account is that even though “everybody” had fallen into evil ways, there was still a family that did not succumb to these lower standards. How often do I lower my standards because it seems that “everybody is doing it”? Whether it is measuring value in dollars or whether it is relating to others only as they are useful to us or whether it is picking and choosing among God’s children...even if we are tempted to be swallowed up by these cultural norms, here is the story of a man who lived in such times and still took God’s values as the values by which he lived. We could say that Noah shows us that it can be done!

October 14, 2018 Text: Genesis 10:2; 11:10, 27, 31; 12:1-4 “God is Always Working”

Okay. Let me get this mean thought out of the way. Do you have someone in your class who seems to have the answer to every question raised? Without any advance notice, ask that person to read today’s texts aloud. Japheth. Gomer. Magog. Madai. Javan. Tubal. Meshech. Tiras. That’s the first verse (Genesis 10:2). Then, Shem and Arpachshad (Genesis 11:10). Well, you get the idea.

Even though it is obvious that these verses name a lot of folks of whom we have never heard, they also move us to a pivotal part of the story. Tucked away in Genesis 12:27 is a list of Terah’s sons, one of whom is Abram. Then, we meet Sarai, Abram’s wife (Genesis 11:29). Next comes God’s instruction to Abram to head for “the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). Uh, Lord, could you show me the map before I start out on this journey? At 75 years old, Abram, and his family, end up in Canaan (Genesis 12:5), having thought they were settled for good in Haran.

The train of Israel’s journey is now riding on the tracks of obedience. God is using God’s people to fulfill the work of God. God will see that Abram is a blessing (Genesis 12:2). The word for blessing is *bârak*, which literally can mean “to kneel.” One image that comes to mind is when someone kneels before the Queen of England in order to be honored and knighted. Abram is going to be honored and respected for his faithfulness.

October 21, 2018 Text: Genesis 18:9-15; 21:1-7 “Abraham and Sarah Birth God’s People”

Which of God’s instructions and promises do you find laughable? Love your neighbor? Do good to your enemy? Give a tithe of your money? I won’t leave you? My peace passes understanding? Most of us can identify with Abraham and Sarah (note the name changes: Genesis 17:5, 15) when they guffaw at the promise of God to give them a son (Genesis 18:13). This couple was not the last to wonder if God is all talk and no action.

They remembered laughing at the very idea of someone 100 years old becoming a parent, so when their son Isaac was born they gave him a name that means “he who laughs.” In a footnote in the Common English Bible an alternative translation of Sarah’s comment in Genesis 21:6 is suggested: “God has made a joke of me. Everyone who hears about it will laugh at me.” Have you ever hesitated to do something because of a fear that folks around you would make fun of you?

The birth of Isaac gave a small package of evidence that God was going

Even as God prepares to bring the destroying floodwaters, God is already making plans for a new beginning. God calls on Noah to build an ark, save his family, and bring aboard pairs of animals that can reproduce (Genesis 6:18-20). The judgment of God is packaged with a promise for a new tomorrow. There is a spark of grace even as the time comes to bring an end to the created order.

The careful and detailed outline of what the ark is to be like (Genesis 6:14-16) reveals a God who gets involved even in the small things of life. And the text says that Noah “did everything exactly as God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22). I contrast that with my looking around for a little wiggle room so I don’t have to do exactly what God has asked me to do. For one thing, there is that “love your neighbor” thing. Noah set a good example of obedience.

What Someone Else Has Said:

James Harnish (*Journeys with the People of Genesis*, Upper Room Books) wrote: “The solitary presence of Noah affirms that faithfulness and goodness are always possible...He was only one man, but he was all God needed to save the world.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Grant me a new beginning, O God...”

If we read past these printed verses, we see that Abram did slip from time to time (Genesis 12:11-13, for example). God is able to work God’s gifts for God’s People even though God has to deal with human limitations.

These are still descendants of Noah who are at work. Noah’s faithfulness and obedience are still bearing fruit. And now the plot thickens because Genesis 11:30 notes that Sarai, Abram’s wife, was unable to have children. Even so, the Lord promised Abram “of you I will make a great nation” (Genesis 12:2). Have you looked ahead? You know that the story does not end with a barren Sarai. Through all these trails comes the moving mystery of God at work.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Bruce Feiler (*Abraham*, William Morrow) has written: “To be a child of Abraham is to respond to God’s Call, to start a voyage, to become a stranger. As easy as it is to forget today—when Christianity is the dominant religion in half the world—early Christians felt a powerful sense of being alien. Departure is paramount to Christian identity.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “God who called Noah, God who called Abraham, I am listening...”

to make good on God’s promise to create a great nation (Genesis 12:2). It’s not much of a sign, but at least it points in the right direction. That happens sometimes when we are struggling to grasp God’s will. It is not always a blazing sign in the sky; it might be as simple as the need for Abraham to go to Wal-Mart to buy diapers!

I remember when I was beginning to hear God’s call for me to go into ordained ministry. Was it a genuine call? Was it just the family business? Could I develop new gifts for new situations? Would I get tired of “so much church”? No one at the church knew I was looking at this life call, but one Sunday, an older member of the congregation asked, “Belton, have you ever thought about going into the ministry?” That was not a flashing neon answer, but it was a nudge in the right direction.

The birth of Isaac is that sort of nudge for Abraham and Sarah. It certainly was dramatic, but the birth of one more in this long line of de-

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scendants of Noah was really just another six pounds, 8 ounces of humanity.

Might you be that nudge for someone who is uncertain in the faith journey? Might you be the evidence that God is still at work? Go ahead. Laugh. That’s what Sarah did.

October 28, 2018 Text: Genesis 24:12-21, 61-67 “Isaac and Rebekah Continue the Legacy”

To tell you the truth, when I began writing for this session, I sat and stared at the blank computer screen for a good little while. Nothing. I may even have dozed off just a little. Nothing. I got up and did a load of wash. Nothing. I read an obscure, scholarly commentary. Nothing. I muttered, “These verses are nothing more than an old-fashioned love story.”

Then it hit me like a ton of bricks. Exactly! God is using the ordinary experiences of life to bring about God’s purposes. This story is a strange mixture of a father’s wishes (Genesis 24:4), a few camels (Genesis 24:19), a beautiful woman (Genesis 24:16), some gracious hospitality (Genesis 24:32), and maybe even some surging hormones (Genesis 24:67).

Just as I wrote these words, my phone rang. It was a pastor friend from another annual conference. For months, he has been discouraged because each of his appointments seemed to have been in unexciting and business-as-usual places. In each one, he had done the best he could. He called because he had just met with his district superintendent. She told him that because the cabinet observed how he worked to be faithful in small things, they were now going to work to give him a broader opportunity. After telling me that, he added, “I guess God has been using even my troubled times.”

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Three Simple Questions* (Abingdon), R. Job wrote: “We know we cannot do everything to change the world, but we can, by God’s grace, each do our part.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “I offer myself to You, Lord...”

One of the shaping verses of the New Testament is John 1:14, translated in the Common English Bible as “The Word became flesh and made his home among us.” That’s the power of the Savior’s presence; God has chosen to live and move and have divine being in the midst of the routines of life, the daily comings and goings of the human journey. When God wanted to bring God’s full revelation into our midst, God chose the ordinary places of life.

No longer can we easily set aside the common flow of relationships or the patterns of daily life. As evidenced in this week’s study text, God keeps the saving story alive by just what I muttered, “These verses are nothing more than an old-fashioned love story.”

And I guess I should keep my eye out for a few stray camels.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Gratitude* (Compendium), Dan Zadra has quoted Leo Buscaglia: “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Thank You, life-giving Lord, that You move in life’s ordinary places...”

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I Love Autumn

by Betty Castleberry

I love autumn. The dance of a brisk fall breeze signals colder days ahead, and maple trees punctuate the landscape with bright tartan colors. Flower beds sing with a chorus of vividly colored pansies and mums. Roadside stands beckon travelers to stop and fill rustic wooden baskets with firm red apples. Front porches are adorned with scarecrows and hay bales. Chatter at the local grocery stores often turns to which team will win the Friday night football game, or when the first freeze will occur.

Our nation's countryside is sprinkled with autumn celebrations. They may be called fall festivals, harvest festivals, or something entirely different, but their common thread is to applaud the autumn season. I dare anyone to leave one of these wonderful gatherings without being wooed by a sweet funnel cake, or a spicy homemade candle.

The animals know when it is autumn. My hummingbird feeder, a place in spring and summer for the tiny winged ones to congregate, is now abandoned. At the same time, crows are abundant. They convene on high wires and in tree tops, greeting the day with a cacophony of calls. Other creatures tend to the business of preparing for winter. Sometimes, I think they are wiser than we are. They don't neglect their chores, but go about them with gusto, gathering and storing and hiding.

Autumn is the perfect season for making pumpkin pie. There is nothing like the aroma of cinnamon and ginger to make a kitchen extra cozy. Sharing a piece of warm pumpkin pie with a loved one is one of life's vastly underrated pleasures.

Some people do not like to see autumn arrive. They view it as an end to lazy summer days, instead of heralding in a new season filled with brilliant color. As I enter the autumn of my life, I realize how blessed I am. My life is dotted with the rich hues of children and grandchildren. I no longer receive a pay check, but I am quite wealthy. Watching a toddler, head bowed in prayer, is the most wonderful harvest anyone could reap.

The cooler autumn days do not bother me. I welcome them, knowing soon it will be winter, and the winter of my life will soon arrive as well. I'm not afraid. If it's as wonderful as my autumn, I'm going to have a ball.

Copyright 2006 Betty Castleberry. The author is a retired-early-by-choice RN who lives in Texas with her husband and three parrots. She has a daughter, step daughter, and five grandchildren. She is a published author, and loves to write for the Lord. Email her @ doncastleberry@sbcglobal.net. Article Source: <http://www.faithwriters.com>-CHRISTIAN WRITERS