

Devotional**Sign of Our Identity****Week of January 9 , 2022***Pastor Seth was off this Sunday, so please enjoy this encore of a baptism-themed devotional from 2019!***Monday**

Read Genesis 17:1-14

This passage is the beginning of God establishing the covenant of circumcision with Abraham. This is not the first time that God has spoken to Abraham, nor is it the first time that God has made a covenant with Abraham (if you have the time, you could read Genesis 15 and see Abram's different reaction to God's covenant-making). God calls out to Abraham (he's still Abram at the moment) and says that Abraham should walk before God and be blameless so that God will make covenant with him. The phrases "walk before" and "be blameless" are getting at the same thing. God is calling for Abraham to be absolutely loyal to God as a subject would be to a king or queen. Abraham immediately falls on his face in submission and obedience. This action is all it takes for God to continue. God doesn't tell Abraham to walk in God's ways and be blameless for a certain amount of time in order to test Abraham before he will continue; instead this act of devotion is enough to proceed. The covenant, the agreement, between God and Abraham is not negotiated. God makes the covenant. God will make an everlasting covenant with all the generations of Abraham. Abraham will be the father of a multitude of nations and kings. Abraham will be faithful to God. The sign of circumcision is given to distinguish those who believed in the importance of God's promises to Abraham from those who did not. So important were these promises and this faithfulness that it was to extend to the next generation at eight days old. What is so important to you that you would or do raise your child to act or believe in a certain way?

Tuesday

Read Genesis 17:11-14 and Galatians 3:15-22

In the Reformed tradition (which includes Presbyterians), we see a very strong link between this passage about God's covenant expressed through circumcision and God's covenant expressed through baptism. In Genesis 15:6, Abraham believes God and God credits this faith as righteousness. In our way of speaking, Abraham is saved by his faith in God. Abraham is now given the act of circumcision as a sign of faithfulness to God. Abraham is saved by God's grace through his faith in God. God makes circumcision a sign (an identifier) of salvation. God says that this sign of salvation should be extended to every male who becomes part of the household, whether child or adult in our Genesis passage. We see this same pattern in baptism. It is a sign of God's covenant love and grace that we extend the sign beyond ourselves to our children (we will see more of this in the New Testament as we progress in our sermon series).

The sign of circumcision does not guarantee salvation for all of those who receive it, but it is meant to distinguish those who believed in the importance of God's promises to Abraham. It didn't guarantee that they would believe they were important... and this is a problem God's

people continually face. Many of the Jewish people who would challenge Jesus and the early Jesus followers would claim that since they were circumcised they were all set. Their identity through circumcision was all that mattered. Jesus and the New Testament counter that it was by faith and devotion to God that fulfills the covenant. Remember, it started with Abram obediently bowing before God in faith. So, in all that you do and all of who you are, dedicate yourself and your household not only to the outward symbols of devotion to God but cultivate an inner life for God – may your heart, mind, body, and spirit be fully devoted to the Triune God.

Wednesday

Read Galatians 3:23-29

There's a lot to unpack this week! We didn't explore Galatians 3:15-22 too much yesterday, but the flow of the argument goes like this: covenants are not broken, the law does not get rid of God's covenant to Abraham, the law is there because we violate God's promises, and Jesus is the chief offspring to whom the covenant applies (this is what Paul is expressing in v. 16). So, to pick up on Paul's line of thought in our passage today: we were captive under the law (captive because we are too weak and sinful to fulfill the law), but Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf and now through faith in Jesus we are free, and Jesus Christ makes us heirs of his faithfulness through our faith so that now our chief identity is as a child of God in Christ and so heir to the promises of God to Abraham, which means that every other identity marker is far in the distance compared with our identity in Christ.

OK then. Here's the big takeaway: Whatever else you think you are – race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, political outlook, national citizenship, where you are from – it all pales in comparison to who you are in Jesus Christ. That goes for you and for others. We are one in Christ Jesus. We are united in our diversity, we are not all the same, but as we have been baptized in Christ, so we are chiefly identified in Christ. So, today and every day, cling to your identity in Christ!

Thursday

Read Galatians 3:27

Let us take a break from all that heavy lifting. Read this verse a few times. Rest in this verse. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." It kinda sounds like putting on Christ is like putting on clothes. Funny, huh? That's actually what Paul is going for with those words. In your baptism and faith, you are a new creation and have put on Christ. Rest and have joy in this identity.

Friday

Please read and prayerfully reflect upon Acts 10:44-48 and Acts 16:25-34 as we prepare for Sunday worship.