

10am HC Sunday 12 March 2017

Lent 2

Gen 12:1-4 and John 3:1-17

Encountering God brings life.

PRAY

I was sent a wonderful picture this week of our friend Lottie. She lived here in London for 2 years and now she has gone back home to NZ and she has started training as a midwife. She sent us a picture of her with her first “Catch,” that is the first baby she has helped to deliver. Her message said. “It was the best day of my life. I just know this is the job for me.”

I get that because birth is just amazing. Birth is the start of every human life and today we are going to be considering birth and life.

Last week we began our theme for lent of “Encountering God” and we looked at how encountering God changes our story. We saw how Jesus in the desert entered into a kind of Flashback replaying the classic scene of temptation leading to fall by entering into temptation and yet not falling but choosing to stand on all the promises of

God. Because Jesus did that to recreate humanity we saw that encountering God changes our story.

Today we are going to look at how encountering God brings life.

Look with me at the Gen 12:1-4 passage.

This is the very first occurrence of the word bless in the whole Bible. And it has a strong association with life. As in Ps 133:3: *It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.*

Blessing is equated to eternal life. It is what God has always wanted to for us. Bringing life is the primary purpose of God.

So when God says he is going to use Abram to bless all the families on Earth it is close to saying “Through you all the families on Earth can be given life that lasts.”

Abraham might not have known how God planned to do this but he would have known that all human life starts with a birth.

So with that in mind, we skip forward to John 3 and Jesus with Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a *good Jew and descended* from this same Abram we just read about. He is a *learned teacher* and scholar too. Nicodemus is sneaking around at night to see Jesus because he appears to be especially *interested* in the miracles that Jesus is performing.

But Jesus is not very impressed by any of that. He's almost dismissive. You might be a descendent of Abraham. You might have all the learning in the world. You might be interested in miracles but Jesus says, only one thing is required for life and that is birth. And you are not yet born.

Nicodemus is astonished. "How is birth going to happen to a mature man like me?"

Jesus says, I can see you are physically alive, Nicodemus, but are you alive to God? Because being alive to God is

the what real life is all about. And being alive to God requires choosing rebirth in water and spirit.

Let's see what Jesus means by birth in water first.

Does anyone know what this is? (the font.)

What is it called?

What is it for?

Why is it built here?

It is here to represent the fact that baptism, that is birth through water, comes at the beginning of our life with God. It is the moment when we publically say goodbye to life without Jesus and die to life lived without reference to God.

That is going into the water.

Then as we come up out of the water we enact rising as Jesus rose from the dead. We start a new life trusting in Jesus to ensure that like Him we will never perish but have eternal life. Baptism makes us new. And births us, by God's grace into, our God-aligned life.

We become new people, in a new family, where all members are equal in the eyes of God. There are no second-class citizens here as we are all God's children and God is particularly keen on all of us.

And we need the spirit because being family is really hard sometimes. So life born in the spirit means that we are filled with the Spirit and the Spirit enables us to display spirit-like, that is Christ like, God-like characteristics. We are born from above, we don't have to live like we used to. Instead we are free to display...

“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Gal 5:22

Growing in that likeness in the spirit is often evidence of God's life bubbling in us.

So having been born from above by water and the Spirit we live as family. A family of God's children made up of people from every continent and every age. We don't get to choose each other but we do get to choose to love each other. We are equals because God parents each of

us and grand-parents none of us. We are all first generation loved.

In a moment we will do something most families get to do together. We gather around a table and we will share a family meal.

For us this is in the form of HC. But the symbolism of a table where we are all invited by Jesus Himself to eat is powerful.

And then later we have coffee. We chat and spend time together. This is not unimportant. This is family life!

Today I have a little family quiz sheet that I hope the many of you are going to try and complete. I will have a prize for the winners next week. It is a quiz that will help us get to know each other better because families should know each other!

Also during coffee I will be in the lady chapel to pray for any in our family who are unwell, or need a little encouragement. I'd also love to talk to you more about the new birth that Jesus offers, life in the spirit, and

baptism, if you would find that helpful. Please bring your drink and come and see me.

So, to conclude.

- Encountering God brings life.
- That life starts with spiritual birth which is evidenced by becoming more like the spirit of God.
- Our birth into God's family makes us equal with each other and bound to each other with cords of family love.

The invitation to new life is open to all and it starts with an encounter with Jesus.

AMEN