

Hillcrest Congregational Church, UCC  
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February 28, 2010  
Press On

Today is a day of celebration. Can you think of a reason to celebrate? Tell me one or two that come to your mind. The festival and 50 years of amazing art, amazing people, amazing work that you all have done here together. Music, drama, people, creation, life. How about if we celebrated that God IS?

Our story from the Bible today is about Abram. Who is this guy? This is Abraham, before he made a covenant with God his name was changed to Abraham. When he was 75, God called Abram to leave his home in Ur and to go to a land God would show him. In return, God promised to make Abram a great nation and a blessing. And Abram was faithful to that journey for a long time, but he did not have the rewards that he expected. Abram was childless.

Abram asks God, and God reaffirms the promise made. God brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then God said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Think about it, the Creator of the universe decides not only to interact but to have a relationship with one creation, Abram. Is that not something to celebrate?

Then the Creator decides to make a promise, a covenant: to extend the life of this creation, through out history, through descendants too numerous to count. Is that not something to celebrate?

And through this promise, through these descendants, God promises to be with the creation. Is that not something to celebrate?

And not only will God be present but God will bless the creation and make it a blessing for all, through out all time. Is that not something to celebrate?

God the Creator, in relationship with creation, blessing all forever. Called to be in relationship and blessing with the Creator, co-creators through all time. Is that not something to celebrate?

And yet, in the story about Abram, and in the story about Jesus, we see darkness and shadows. God tells Abram that the people will be aliens in a land that is not theirs. They will be slaves, oppressed for four hundred years.

Jesus is warned by some Pharisees that Herod is coming to kill him. And he can foresee that like prophets before him, he will face death in Jerusalem. He knows that some people will listen to him, and others will turn their backs. This does not seem to be something to celebrate.

So what is in this for us to celebrate? There are times when we just don't feel like celebrating. During the time of the apostle Paul, there were many times people did not feel like celebrating. There were quarrels between people, some even got up and left. They didn't have many people. The money was scarce. The government was corrupt. There was confusion about what was the right thing to do to accomplish what they set out to do. And things just didn't go the way they

thought they would. Paul wrote to the church in Phillipi, press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God. Which brings us right back to the call and promise that God made to Abram. Come and follow me I have a plan for your future. Look at the stars, so shall your descendants be.

Yet in both cases there is still a possibility in the future. God promises that Abrams people will be rescued from their captivity and Abram will be at peace. Jesus holds out hope that people will understand his message of healing and wholeness in God. That they will not only see him, but recognize him when they greet him as prophets throughout time have been greeted: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”