

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

traditional land of the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatami and Ojibwe.

Box 93, Dresden, Ontario NOP 1M0

519-683-2442 standrewspcdresden@gmail.com Rev. Andy Cornell

Worship This Week Oct. 8, 2023

Piano – Dorothy O'Neill

Sound/powerpoint/livestream –

WELCOME & Prayer –

Two SONGS – Father, we love you. (Jesus, Spirit—) I worship You, Almighty God

YOUNG & YOUNG AT HEART – Andy (Rita doing Sunday School this week)

Kid's PRAYER –

SONG – Rock-a my soul

RECEIVE OFFERING –

ANNOUNCEMENTS –

GOOD NEWS MOMENTS –

PRAYER REQUESTS/PRAYER –

SCRIPTURE – Genesis 18:16-33

Let's set this up. Abram and Serai had just been renamed Abraham and Sarah. They have been wandering for 15 years, sent forth by the promise that they would become a great nation. They find themselves camped near the city of Sodom. God had just sent three messengers to Abraham and Sarah to remind them that Sarah would soon be pregnant. The three messengers are actually the Lord Jesus and two angels. The travelers are welcomed warmly and shown great hospitality.

16 Then the men got up from their meal and looked out toward Sodom. As they left, Abraham went with them to send them on their way. 17 "Should I hide my plan from Abraham?" the Lord asked. 18 "For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. 19 I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised." 20 So the Lord told Abraham, "I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant. 21 I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I have heard. If not, I want to know." 22 The other men turned and headed toward Sodom, but the Lord remained with Abraham. 23 Abraham approached him and said, "Will you sweep

away both the righteous and the wicked? 24 Suppose you find fifty righteous people living there in the city—will you still sweep it away and not spare it for their sakes? 25 Surely you wouldn't do such a thing, destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Why, you would be treating the righteous and the wicked exactly the same! Surely you wouldn't do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?" 26 And the Lord replied, "If I find fifty righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the entire city for their sake." 27 Then Abraham spoke again. "Since I have begun, let me speak further to my Lord, even though I am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose there are only forty-five righteous people rather than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And the Lord said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five righteous people there." 29 Then Abraham pressed his request further. "Suppose there are only forty?" And the Lord replied, "I will not destroy it for the sake of the forty." 30 "Please don't be angry, my Lord," Abraham pleaded. "Let me speak—suppose only thirty righteous people are found?" And the Lord replied, "I will not destroy it if I find thirty." 31 Then Abraham said, "Since I have dared to speak to the Lord, let me continue—suppose there are only twenty?" And the Lord replied, "Then I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty." 32 Finally, Abraham said, "Lord, please don't be angry with me if I speak one more time. Suppose only ten are found there?" And the Lord replied, "Then I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten." 33 When the Lord had finished his conversation with Abraham, he went on his way, and Abraham returned to his tent.

MESSAGE –

This is among the more unique passages in scripture. It's not often we have an opportunity to see dialogue with God. There's the Lord's conversation with Satan in the opening chapter of Job and Job's discussions with God in the conclusion.

First, let's get one fallacy out of the way. It's been suggested by some that this dialogue between Abraham and the Lord is proof that we can change God's mind. And further, that God consults with us prior to making a decision. Neither proposition is true.

When you read this closely, we realize Abraham does not change God's mind. He merely inquires into the working of God's mind. God had already decided to destroy Sodom. Abraham was trying to determine how many innocent people actually resided there. His own nephew Lot was among the residents, so perhaps Abraham was asking out of concern for his own family, which is understandable.

God is all knowing and powerful. He sees everything. Why would He consult with much lesser and sinful beings? God "makes everything work out according to his plan." (Ephesians 1:11) What this passage reveals is that God lets us in on his plans. This is revealed in these remarkable words.

17 "Should I hide my plan from Abraham?" the Lord asked. 18 "For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. 19 I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised." (Gen 18:17-19)

The question was rhetorical. God wasn't undecided.

The purpose of this is so that the author of Genesis – and everyone in history – would have a glimpse into God's mind. We are invited to get to know God's mind. Abraham had been selected for a mighty purpose, to bring a glimpse of God's Kingdom into the world, to reveal His character and to create a Holy Nation that would be centred on the pursuit of Godliness. God's ways would be revealed and the people would be instructed in them. This revelation is alive today in the church of Christ. This insight into the mind of God was for all people at all times in history.

We are invited to understand this exchange between Abraham and the Lord as a prayer. We can pray this way. And in God's responses, we get to know him more, we see a glimpse of His Kingdom, we get insight into His holy and perfect mind.

God involves us in His plans. Not as equal but as junior partners. In the family. Partners means he has given us our own ministries. It's why everyone has gifts

and talents. Every believer has a role to play in the revelation of God's Kingdom and character in an otherwise dark world. God remains the commander in chief but we are his officers and soldiers in a battle against darkness.

In that hierarchy, we follow orders from God. Again, we must not be insubordinate. We can inquire into the how, like Mary the Mother of Jesus did when she asked the angel how a virgin would hear a child. We are advised not to question God's ability to make it happen.

We can have a conversation with God – as Abraham's conversation with the Lord demonstrates. Note the respect in which Abraham speaks. And note the calm and rational response.

We can be bold in our requests. On the surface, it may appear that Abraham is trying to bargain with the Lord, like someone talk a vendor down in price. Keep in mind God had already decided to wipe out Sodom. And God had no intention of taking innocent lives also in this particular campaign. God knew that Lot and his family were righteous – read ahead to the next chapter and you see the two angels leading them out of the city just before the volcano erupts.

Prayer doesn't change God – it changes us. We know that God gives us the words to use in prayer. That is not to suggest that we are robots being programmed by Him or that we are puppets. We are created in God's image. Here is where the partnership comes into play. As believers, we join the Family of God; we are grafted into the tree. Consider the powerful words spoken by Paul in Romans 11:17 – “And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God's special olive tree.” When we pray in partnership with God and receive His words, we share in this “rich nourishment.” This is how the Kingdom is brought about.

The Apostle John puts it this way – “And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him.” (1 John 5:14) We are to seek God's will in prayer. We are welcome to take steps to understand the mind of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Finally, all of this must be done in reverence. Abraham's words were not argumentative; they were respectful. "Let me speak further to my Lord, even though I am but dust and ashes" (v27), "Please don't be angry, my Lord," Abraham pleaded. Let me speak." (v30), "Since I have dared to speak to the Lord, let me continue" (v31), "Lord, please don't be angry with me if I speak one more time." (v32). It's why the Lord instructs us to approach God the Father saying, "hallowed" or "Holy" is your name.

There's one other valuable thing to know from this passage. And it's a powerful truth. The Lord walks among us. He resides in heaven. But as we have seen in our exploration of the journeys of Abraham and Sarah, the Lord shows up in person from time to time. The mysterious priest and king Melchizedek, for example. And now the Lord appears with two angels – all in human form.

The Lord appears not only to teach and reveal God, but also to see for himself what we are doing. While it is true that God can see from heaven, it's His pleasure and part of His plan to occasionally walk among us. The Lord told Abraham, "I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant. I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I have heard. If not, I want to know." (v20-21). The great outcry might have been prayers from the righteous. They might have been direct reports from angelic beings, or from the souls of the righteous who entered the Kingdom.

All of this leads to the suggestion that the Lord and His angels appear in human form, undercover, as it were, in today's world. We are commanded in Hebrews 13:2 to "show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!" Abraham and Sarah welcome the three men warmly and immediately provided food and a place to rest. Did they know their true identities? Perhaps. Even if they did not, at some point Abraham's eyes were opened and certainly he knew he was having a conversation with the Lord when He revealed the purpose of his visit.

In North America in 2023 travellers don't arrive in town and wait in the village square for someone to invite them home. We have hotels and AirBnb. In today's world, it might be the stranger in need. The person who stops and asks for directions or has a question about something. We have a wariness about strangers because of fearmongers who want to sell alarm systems and – if we were in the

US – guns and gated communities. Of course, we are to be careful – as Jesus said, “wise as foxes and innocents as doves.” And it’s common sense to teach kids about stranger danger. On that note, I can’t see an angel or the Lord approaching kids unless he or she is in childlike form.

All of this might appear to be fantasy or fairy tale, myth or legend. But nothing is impossible for God. I believe God’s angels and the Lord himself walk among us in the same way that Satan’s messengers do the same thing. The purpose is to invite us into a relationship with God, for our spirits to be gradually reformed into something closer to the Spirit of Christ. We learn not only from books but from direct experience. We learn the mind of Christ when we stand with Him and look down upon Sodom and have a conversation about what God has in mind.

For, “Who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?” But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:16)

What a tremendous, powerful gift! To have the mind of Christ is powerful, and also humbling. To know that the all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving creator of the universe invites us personally into his presence and shares his plans with us and actually partners with us is something that is beyond words and comprehension. Wow. Just wow.

Amen.

HYMN – Now thank we all our God

BENEDICTION –