

## **Pentecost 9C**

### **Genesis 15:1-6**

#### **CHILDREN**

Jesus sees all the good things you are going to be able to accomplish someday. That is why you have a brain. You think, dream and hope with your brain. Your brain is wonderful!

You know what computers do, right? You may have small computers at home. Even a small calculator is a simple computer. A computer tries to do some of the things our brain does, yes? Sometimes we hear of computers that can store millions of bits of information. Did you know that the little ten ounce computer in your head can store trillions of bits of information? One scientist said if they built a computer big enough to store as much as the average brain, it would cost 3 billion dollars \$\$\$\$\$\$\$.

Amazing, you were born with that computer right in your head. It is a free gift from God. He has entrusted it to you. All he asks is that you go to school, study hard, and let your brain grow. Then use it to make the world a better place. That should make you feel important. You are a unique creation of God [Mayella, you are a tall unique gift of God at age 9; Will and Byron ,you are gifted for sports and music]. You are very special to Him.



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## **FOR EDUCATORS**

You sit in your home office with the AC down, a podcast blasting and surrounded by file folders. This means one thing: the start of the academic year is quickly approaching. It is crunch time, and You find yourself in the rhythm of preparation.

You are excited and nervous, the certain mix of emotions that will result in stress, dreams, from now until the day that your freshmen moves into their new dormitories and some other's into elementary school with you as teacher. As you await their arrival, you prepare your coursework/lesson plans [new ones, never recycle]. You may have a tradition when it comes to this, one that started your first semester of teaching. You were worried

that students would not want to speak in class. So, you thought back to your elementary school days when your teacher would have names written on popsicle sticks. When the class was quiet or not answering questions, she would pull a popsicle stick with a name on it, and that student was asked to add their voice to the class discussion.

I thought that this method was a good one. While I taught elementary and Religious Education, we all occasionally need a little encouragement to share our thoughts. The popsicle-stick-method went well that first semester. I didn't really use them, but at the end of the semester, I felt I couldn't just throw them out. I kept those popsicle sticks with names, and each semester I have added more and more to them. They are a collection for me. And each year I take the time to add a new list of names to popsicle sticks.

As I see their names again and again, I think about what type of student they continued to be in life. Did they have a crisis of faith? Will they always enjoy lectures? Did they have a life-altering first semester in college, in their first job in their major ? With each name, I say a prayer for what will be or what will become of them and add them to their collection jar. This collection holds the hopes, the joys and the not-yet of this coming year. It is a nice reminder for me to slow down, put aside my worries and anxieties and think about these new students and their needs or concerns.

As I prepare the popsicle sticks this year, I decide to add the names of new ministry colleagues – not to call on in class but so I can say a prayer over them. I know that all systems of education have gone through major changes and shifts these last two years and higher education is no different. We've had a lot of retirements and changes in staffing structures and pastors, and we could all use a blessing.

As I pray and prepare for this coming year, I am ever mindful of my popsicle sticks — of the hope, the joys, the challenge, the struggles that are yet to come. And I ask for God's guidance and support for all that we will face. This task has become a ritual for me and one that I am grateful for, for it gets me out of my mind of anxiety and into thinking about and praying for those who will be new to our community.

## **ADULT EDUCATION**

In seminary, staff and students give weekly chapel messages. Reading Genesis 15:1-6, We followed the lectionary calendar for our chapel services and John's turn fell on the day Genesis 15:1-6 was assigned. In this passage, God promises elderly Abram countless descendants, even though he and his wife Sarah had yet to conceive. The text couldn't have been a more painful selection for John. He and his wife Sarah were still recovering from the devastating news that they would not be able to have children.

It was suggested to John that he didn't have to use the assigned text. "Feel free to skip it, choose a different text." But John decided to stick with his assignment, to see where the text and the Spirit would lead.

Abram is lauded for his faithfulness and trust in God. Hebrews 11:8-16 describes Abraham as the one who followed God into unknown territory, guided only by God's promises. He rarely questions or complains — except when it came to his and Sarah's ability to conceive. Abram was old; Sarah had been barren a long time. So when God says, "Do not be afraid, Abram, your reward shall be very great," Abram questions that God can give him the reward he truly desires — a child. "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless?"

This passage is the first recorded dialogue between God and Abram, and it speaks well of their relationship. Abram, at this point, feels free to question. God responds with a prophetic word, calling on Abram's trust. "Look toward heaven and count the stars ... So shall your descendants be." The Hebrew word translated in verse 6 as "believed" may also be translated as "trusted." Abram doesn't know how this promise of God will be fulfilled at this point in the dialogue, but he trusts, nevertheless. This response of Abram's is reckoned as "righteous," or placing him in "right" relationship with God.

As John explored this text he resonated with Abram's questioning. Unsure of God's promises, John also wanted to know what reward awaited him.

In his *Feasting on the Word* commentary on this text, Daniel M. Debevoise writes that we are oftentimes "tempted to think of faith only as unquestioning acceptance or silent submission." Here, Abram questions, but then presses on. He does not disengage from God. He moves forward even in his uncertainty, following where the Spirit leads. Debevoise continues, "Like Abram, we also have questions that will not be silenced as we try to walk in faithfulness to God."

In his message, John found his way of articulating how challenging moments arise often in life, moments when doubt and questions assail us. But allowing these challenges to stop us short, or disengage from relationship, keeps us from growth and future rewards. John wasn't sure what would come from his challenging time. But he knew he needed to push through, to press forward in his faith that God's promises of reward were true.

I can't imagine how painful it must have been for John to stick with his assigned text, to stay engaged with Abram's story. Standing before our seminary community, gripping the sides of the chapel's small wooden pulpit for support, John's pain surfaced time and time again, choking him as he spoke about the loss he and his wife Sarah

experienced and their questions that remained. I also can't imagine a greater model of faithfulness.

Questions for reflection:

1. What thoughts, feelings, or questions arose as you read this text?
2. When have you questioned God's promises? Where did that dialogue with God lead you?
3. Who have you looked to as a model of faithfulness during difficult times?