



*A Way Out of No Way*  
(2nd in the Lenten Sermon Series, "Promises Promises")  
*Genesis 17:1-16*

Sunday, February 25th, 2018 • 2nd Sunday In Lent  
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois  
Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.

Frizzel Gray, (you kind of wonder what mother would name her son "Frizzel", don't you?) grew up in one of the toughest neighborhoods in Baltimore, a section of the city known as "Turner's Corner". His single mother worked multiple jobs as she cared for her children and did the best she could to keep them safe from the mean and alluring streets of the neighborhood. When times were particularly hard she would encourage her children to have faith and remember that "God will find a way out of no way."

When Frizzel was sixteen his mother was diagnosed with cancer and died shortly thereafter leaving him and his sisters alone. Over the next six years he made several bad decisions. He dropped out of school and slowly succumbed to the values of the tough neighborhood streets. He became a street hustler and small-time thug. He mastered "the stare" and the pecking order needed for survival.

Then, when he was around 22 years old something happened that to this day he finds it difficult to explain. He was shooting craps with his buddies in an alley on "Hankin's Corner", named by the neighborhood after a favorite liquor store. It was summer and the night was hot and muggy. Suddenly, Frizzel began to feel very odd, funny. In spite of the heat he suddenly chilled to the bone and his knees began to weaken. He slowly slid down the brick wall that he was leaning against into a sitting position. Voices went in and out. He began to lose his focus. And then a cloud began to suddenly come toward him, silently. As the cloud approached the chill left Frizzel's bones and was replaced by a strange comforting warmth. It was familiar. Where had he felt it before? Ah, when he was six years old. It was like the warmth of his mother. It was Love. He had forgotten what it felt like.

Then, in the midst of the cloud a face slowly took shape. As it came into view Frizzel recognized it as his mother's face. And she was looking intently at him with eyes that were so filled with sadness that it hurt. She saw what he had become and she looked away a cosmic sense of sadness. Then she turned to him again with those eyes, but this time they were different. They were filled with Love.

Frizzel Gray vowed at that moment things would be different. He walked into that alley as Frizzel Gray but he walked out of it as Kweisi Mfume, "son of conquering kings". In the subsequent years he received his G.E.D., a personality on a popular Baltimore radio station, a city councilman, a congressman, the president of the N.A.A.C.P., and is currently the chair of the board of regents of Morgan State University.

Today is the second in our Lenten sermon series on “covenants”, a term that we do not use much in everyday language anymore. It is an agreement. Last week we explored the covenant that God made with Noah and all of Creation Forever and Ever. This week we look at the covenant between God and Abraham.

This is the second covenant that God made with Abraham. The first covenant came in chapter 12 of Genesis when God called Abram, as he was then called, to leave his homeland and all that he knew to set off on a journey toward an unknown future armed only with faith in the One that called him. God promised protection, yet Abram was full of doubt. He wasn't sure that he could really trust this Voice, this God.

No sooner had he left his homeland than a famine ravaged the land. Abram went to Egypt in the hopes of finding relief from the famine. While there his wife Sarai caught the attention of Pharaoh who wished to add her to his household. Inquiries were made to Abram regarding Sarai, and Abram, fearful for his own life, lied and told Pharaoh that Sarai was his sister not his wife! It was only God's intervention that saved Sarai from being a permanent part of Pharaoh's household!

And then, later when it appeared that Sarai could not conceive, Abram and Sarai did things “their way” when Sarai gave Abram her handmaid Hagar as a surrogate mother. Abram took Hagar into his tent and she conceived ultimately bearing a son named Ishmael. Twice Abram's faith in the One who called him faltered.

God came to Abram once again with a new covenant, a renewed covenant. God gave Abram a new start, a “do over”, if you will. The promise was reaffirmed. The sign of this covenant was circumcision, a reminder that God is always faithful, God always keeps promises. Their names were changed, Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. Sarah conceived and bore a son named Isaac.

Life happens, as we all know. Things do not always go as planned. Conflict arose between Hagar and Sarah because of their children. When Sarah asked Abraham to banish, “get that woman and her child out of her sight”, Abraham was torn. He was torn between his affection to the mother of his first born child and the mother of the child of the Promise. He was torn between his love for Ishmael and Isaac. Once again God spoke to Abraham and told him to do as his wife Sarah asked. Abraham asked for God's pledge that God would look after Ishmael and Hagar. God told Abraham that since Ishmael was the fruit of Abraham's loins, he was also a child of promise. God would take care of him and his mother. And God did, because God always keeps promises even when we mess things up.

And then later, in that horrible story that is so hard to unpack and understand, so hard to make sense of, the story that just tears at our hearts, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham, not knowing how Isaac could be the child of the Promise and not understanding what God was doing, obeyed. Over the years he learned that God, in impossible situations, can “make a way out of no way.” Abraham took Isaac to the mountain and prepared him for the sacrifice. At the last minute, as Abraham raised his knife, God once again intervened. A more suitable sacrifice was found, a ram caught in the brambles of the mountain. So together, Abraham and Isaac made the sacrifice.

In an episode of Code Black one of the characters, a doctor, is told by a patient who is bravely facing death; “Humans want answers. But the answers that we need do not come with photographic evidence. They require you to believe in something you can’t see. After all, that’s why we call it faith. Otherwise we’d call it proof.”

President Eisenhower once noted that planning is essential but plans are worthless. We like to plan out our days and our hours and our lives. Sometimes we even like to plan the lives of others! (Bad idea, by the way.) But we also need to be open to the movement of God in our lives. In these remaining days of Lent I invite you to try this spiritual discipline. As you wake up take just a few seconds and silently ask God what God has planned for you today; what God wants you to do today. And then, go about your day, work through your checklists and your plans but when an interruption intrudes, silently ask yourself if this is God inviting you to do Kingdom work. Then as you lay down to sleep, briefly review the day in your mind that discover the “God moments” that came to you because you were open to God’s Presence, God’s Plans.

God can make a way out of no way. Amen.