



Second Sunday of Lent March 20, 2011 A

ABRAHAM AND SARAH SHOW US THE WAY

Last week, we heard about Adam and Eve's fall from grace which led to humankind's alienation from God. The call of Abram is the very *first step* in what is often called our Salvation History. It begins with the call of a childless couple, Abram and Sara, later to be called Abraham and Sarah, to signify their new relationship with God.

At 75 years of age, Abraham could have said, "Sorry, Lord, but I'm too old to move again. In fact, we just bought a home in Florida." But instead, Abram went as the Lord directed him. Abram didn't even know where he was going or what he was signing up for. He was simply told to go... "*to a land that I will show you*" (the Promised Land). His obedience and trust in God earned him the title "our father in the faith." Abraham would become the model of a willing spirit open to God's direction. He was destined to become the father of Israel, the father of a nation that would, in turn, be a light to the nations of the world. Finally, we should remember that if Abraham is our "father in the faith," Sarah is our "mother in the faith" because she also obeyed God and was open to bearing a child when she was beyond childbearing age.

For Abraham and Sarah, responding to God's call was more important than the security of place and family. When called to leave their place of security and venture out to an unknown destination, they responded with obedience. They will forever be our role models when it comes to all the leave-takings that life asks of us.

Abraham and Sarah are also great examples of living life to the end. Yogi Berra's often-quoted saying "it ain't over 'til it's over" applies not only to sports but also to life. We are called to live life as fully as we can till the end. When the end comes, we are then called to let go gracefully to God.

A Spirituality for the Long Haul

In his book *Enduring Heart—A Spirituality for the Long Haul*, Wilkie Au speaks about "**soulful lives.**" He begins by quoting Dr. Helen Greenblatt who says: "*We are finally realizing what a wonderful time it is to be a senior. Stuff is stirring. Things are brewing. When people talk about 'getting enough,' they're not just referring to sleep anymore.*"

Then Au continues: *In a recent survey of more than seven thousand older Americans, ages sixty to ninety, an overwhelming majority reported that they were more satisfied with the quality of their lives than ever before. Clearly, this satisfaction level can be attributed to medical breakthroughs that enable seniors to feel better while living longer. In general, gerontology experts believe "the trend indicates just how much senior citizens are enjoying a renewed sense of purpose—a delectation for life. They're flying into space and earning college diplomas, publishing books and exploring the Internet." Keeping up a "delectation for life" is another way of talking about "living with soul."*

Cute Story

The following story (also from Au's book), frequently told to illustrate the importance of making our assumptions explicit for the sake of clear communication, can also be a humorous way of showing that the struggle to live vitally and responsibly is lifelong.

Once there was a sixty-five-year-old man who went to his doctor for a routine physical. After the blood work was done, the doctor met the patient in his office to report the results.

"You're in great shape for a guy who is sixty-five years old," exclaimed the doctor, as he paged through the sheaf of computer printouts from the lab. "It must be because you either maintain a healthy, holistic regime—get your proper rest, eat healthily, and exercise regularly—or you're from good stock. How old, for example, was your father when he died?"

"And did I say my father died?" retorted the sixty-five year-old man. "Actually, he's eighty-five years old and still going strong. He stays in shape by jogging and keeps active socially by being part of the local senior citizens' club."

"Ah, ah, well," stammered the doctor, "how old was your grandfather when he died?"

"And did I say my grandfather died?" the sixty-five year-old man shot back. "Actually, he's 102 years old and still going strong. He doesn't run or jog anymore, but he walks briskly around the block daily and keeps up with his bridge club. He dates occasionally and, in fact, he's getting married in two weeks!"

“He is?” the unsuspecting doctor blurted out. Why would a man who is 102 years old want to get married?”

To which the sixty-five-year-old patient responded evenly, “And did I say he wanted to?”

The story is a lighthearted reminder of the truth that “it’s not over ‘til it’s over.” In some form or other, the need to remain vibrant in all aspects of our being, to stay engaged socially, and to love responsibly continues to the end if we are committed to living life as fully as we can.

Ten ways we can get stuck in life’s journey

In life’s journey, all of us encounter bumps or big hills on the road. If we are unable to make our way over these hills and bumps, we will remain stuck, sometimes permanently. Wilkie Au names ten journey.

1. *Stuck when we let past failures, poor decisions, missed opportunities make us unforgiving of ourselves and cynical about life.*
2. *Stuck when we hang on to resentments toward those who have wronged us and let these resentments chain us to frustrating relationships.*
3. *Stuck when we let ill-health and the normal aches and pains of growing old make us crabby and less appreciative of the small blessings of daily life.*
4. *Stuck when we do not seek help for healing the poor images of the self-resulting from childhood traumas that hamper our present lives.*
5. *Stuck when we let envy of others consume us rather than gratefully acknowledging our own blessings and developing our own gifts.*
6. *Stuck when pain and hurts from past intimate relationships keep us from being loving and vulnerable.*
7. *Stuck when fear of failure prevents us from trying new things.*
8. *Stuck when anger about past disappointments and losses shuts us off from reconciliation with a God who wants to be close to us.*
9. *Stuck when we despairingly stay in a miserable life situation because we cannot trust enough to opt for change.*
10. *Stuck when we let fear rule our lives.*

I should add that we can also get stuck in our relationship with God and church. Many do—sometimes permanently.

Three helpful suggestions to get unstuck

- *Share your story with another caring person.* It could be a priest, deacon, therapist, spiritual director, or a caring friend. The resolution of most of our problems can be

found within ourselves—if we only share out loud our story. Gandhi once said “secrecy is the enemy of freedom.” So many people live in a self-imposed prison because of their failure to share their pain, fear, shame with another. If you think I could be helpful in your attempt to become unstuck, I hope you would not hesitate to contact me.

- *Seek to change what can be changed.* There are some things that cannot be changed (e.g., loss of a spouse or loved one) and other things that cannot be changed at least for now (e.g., a particular relationship, loss of a job or finances). But we can decide how we deal with a particular bump or hill in life’s journey. Two of my favorite sayings are: *“It’s not the circumstances of our lives that will make us or break us, but our attitude towards the circumstances of our lives.”* *“Our lives are not determined by what happens to us, but by how we react to what happens.”* We can see the truth in these sayings when we see two people with pretty much the same challenge, e.g., a loss of some kind: one copes very well while the other is miserable. Changing what can be changed may also involve forgiving a hurt or reaching out for help, like joining a support group.
- *Count your blessings.* We have all heard the saying “things could be worse.” This is true for the vast majority of us, especially in this country. We see the proverbial glass as half full, not half empty.

Prayer for Guidance

*Grant me, Lord, to know what
I ought to know,
to love what I ought to love,
to praise what delights you most,
to value what is precious in your sight,
to hate what is offensive to you.*

*Do not allow me to judge
according to appearances,
nor to pass sentence following
the judgment of the ignorant,
but to discern with true judgment
between things visible and spiritual,
and, above all things,
to seek to know what is the good
pleasure of your will. Amen*

Thomas à Kempis

Have a blessed week,

