

**Sermon: Walking My Talking**

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**Genesis 20:1-18**

**An investment counselor went out on her own. She was shrewd and diligent, so business kept coming in. Pretty soon she realized she needed an in-house counsel, and so she began interviewing young lawyers. “As I’m sure you can understand,” she started off with one of the first applicants, “In a business like this, our personal integrity must be beyond question.” She leaned forward and continued, “Mr. Peterson, are you an honest lawyer?”**

**“Honest?” replied the job prospect. “Let me tell you something about honest. Why, I’m so honest that my father**

**lent me fifteen thousand dollars for my education and I paid back every penny the minute I tried my very first case.”**

**“Impressive. And what sort of case was that?”**

**The lawyer squirmed in his seat and admitted, “He sued me for the money.”**

**In the wisdom literature Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes that,**

**“There is nothing new under the sun.” In context Solomon is talking about the fact that we do not seem to learn our**

**lessons the first, second or sometimes third time around.**

**History records that humanity more often than not repeats the same behaviour expecting a different result which is the definition for insanity.**

**How many of us have said, “Why does this keep happening to me?” The questions I want us to ponder this week are, “What**

**is keeping me from learning my lesson? Is it possible that I do not learn my lesson the first time around because:**

**A: I do not trust God;**

**B: or I live by assumption instead of conversation;**

**C. I want people to like me;**

**D: or I want to be in control so I lie to myself and manipulate others?"**

**We just read a story in Abraham's life in Genesis chapter 20.**

**Let's go back a few pages to another narrative in Abraham's**

**life. In Genesis 12: 1- 20 we see Abe and Sarah in round one of**

**a life lesson. God is instituting the Law of Connection by**

**dividing and conquering at the Tower of Babel and sifting the**

**nation deciding with whom to establish a covenant. In the**

**beginning of chapter 12 Abraham catches God's vision of**

**blessing. God is going to bless the human race through Abraham. God and Abraham have a heart to heart and Abe hears that his livestock, land, family and name would be blessed. The connection Abe had with Yahweh must have been iron clad because Abe took the Sacred at Her word. Friends God always touches our hearts before asking for our service.**

**Today I want to talk about walking in leadership with the understanding that in order for a spiritual leader to create leaders, this person must first be led by faith in God and God alone. While followers may see immediate challenges on the horizon of a vision, leaders see the future from a distance. Leaders dream dreams of what can happen now and what this will mean for future generations. I want us to see a few things in Abraham's story.**

**First, God tells Abraham to leave the comfort of his homeland, his relatives, and everything familiar and go to a strange place and start fresh.**

**(Traci's calling: Corrie ten Boom's house; Angel at Precept; Workshop; Coma Talk)**

**In 1989 I was in my one and only clinical depression. I was dealing with a broken heart and entering the beginning of addressing my sexual orientation. I was taking a Masters Precept Workshop so I could be certified at the highest level to teach others how to study the Scriptures through the Inductive Method. I did not speak a word to any of the 2500 in attendance. I did not answer one question. I sat and listened in silence. On the last day, as I was standing back and watching the author and teacher sign books and offer pastoral**

care, a woman appeared in front of me, as if walking out of thin air. She had turquoise eyes, a light brown bob that shimmered and no make-up. Her blouse and skirt consisted of a summer cotton print that was almost see through. She was beautiful and ageless. She spoke to me and said, "God has heard everything you have said this weekend." I replied, "I have not said a word." She replied, "Yes you have. Your heart has been crying out to God all weekend and God has heard you. The Spirit wants you to know that you will be going places and teaching people just like her (pointing to the author), and you will be writing books that people need. It will happen when you are ready. God loves you." I looked over at the author and then turned towards the woman and she was gone. Glowing one moment and gone the next.

**In 1992 I was teaching in Holland. I wanted to tour Corrie ten Boom's home in De Hague so my ex-husband and I went to her home and knocked on the front door. A Dutch gentleman opened the door and touch my cheek and told me he had been preparing to meet me and that I needed to come back in the afternoon for a private tour. I returned at 3 pm and he guided me and my ex-husband on a tour where I was allowed to touch things and stand in the Hiding Place. I was allowed to video the tour but towards the end, the man began to tell me about plans that God had for me for ministry beyond anything I had dreamed and I had to turn my camera off because I was crying and shaking. When the tour was over the man placed his hand on top of my head and began praying a blessing over me in broken Dutch and English. He said I would write, sing and teach in places far away and in ways I would not**

**understand until much later. When he was finished he kissed my cheek and closed the door.**

**Then in 1994 I became very ill with meningitis and encephalitis. I was in a semi-coma and my family was called into the hospital as the outcome was not looking positive. In the middle of the night I was rolled into a hall beside an elevator. Half aware of anything or anyone I could make out the skyline of downtown Fort Worth in a huge window. When the girls and I would travel during my itinerant ministry with my ex, as we approached home after a time away of teaching, the first one to see the skyline of downtown Fort Worth and say "I Love You" got to decide what we would have for dinner.**

**Looking at the skyline and wanting more than anything to be a mother to Sarah and Amy, I heard inside my spirit, “Traci, how much do you love me?”**

**I thought, “You know I love you God”.**

**Again I heard, “Traci, how much do you love me?”**

**And again I replied, “You know I love you God.”**

**A third time I heard, “Traci, how much do you love me?”**

**And I replied, “I love you more than anything.”**

**Then I heard, “Good because you are going to leave the home that you love and some of the people that you love and go to a place and people to become who you are so I can live and love through you beyond your wildest dreams.”**

**I remember smiling. The next morning I woke up out of the coma to my daughters beside me in my bed reciting the story I used to read to them, Oscar Wilde's The Selfish Giant. Sarah was saying, "Tell me who hath wounded thee so I may take my sword and slay him!" Then Amy said, "Nay, these are the wounds of love."**

**I left my home, my mother and step-father (nanny and Big Guy), my brothers, my best friend Helen Hubbard and Hulon (Granny and Granddad), friends and colleagues to move to Calgary with my ex and daughters in January 1995 and returned here after my divorce in 1996 and a thousand lessons later, twenty years later, broken and spilled out, renewed and strengthened for my journey, here I stand.**

**Secondly, we have to leave before we can cleave to God and enjoy a heart to heart relationship. When God asks us to let go of something or someone familiar, it is to create room for a blessing. A ship cannot sail when it is tied to a dock.**

**Thirdly, the cure to being self-deceived, the cure to getting released from the dock, the cure to our whining and wondering, “Why is this happening to me again? Why aren’t I getting closer to the vision, to the blessing?” The cure is trust and authenticity...in one word INTEGRITY.**

**Abraham didn’t trust God in chapter 12 because he was tied to the dock of fear around Pharaoh’s religious beliefs. So what does he do? He tells Sarah to play the role of his sister. Before they enter Egypt Abe assumes and puts the energy out there, (v. 12), that the Egyptians are going to think Sarah is hot and**

knowing that she is Abe's wife, they will want to kill Abe and take her for their own. What happens? Pharaoh takes Sarah for a slumber party and God sends plagues to Egypt. Pharaoh asks Abe what's up with this and sends him away. Chapter 20, Abe and Sarah land in Gerar and he does it again. He assumes King Abimelech does not respect Yahweh or Israel and he asks Sarah to lie again. But this time God speaks to Abimelech in a dream and the King answers back beginning with saying, "Lord". God keeps the King from being intimate with Sarah and like Pharaoh, he asked Abraham, "What is up with you? Because of what you did God has closed up all the wombs of the women in my kingdom." And what does history say? Abe replied, "I did this because I thought...(blah blah blah), and really she is my half-sister so it wasn't a complete manipulation."

**Like Abraham, God calls every one of us.**

**Like Abraham, God has made a promise, a covenant with us.**

**And like Abraham, God tests us. Why?**

**To purify us. To release from ways of thinking and being so we will learn to trust God in all things and to live with integrity even when we cannot make sense of the immediate circumstance or clearly see what lies ahead. God tests us to bring us into deep connection, deep communication with Him, so we may be grounded in our relationship with Her. Clear reception grounds us. Deep connection and personal and communal growth can only happen when we are grounded in our surrender to walking into the ways the Sacred is talking to us. May we never forget that God is with us. God is with Abraham even when he ignores God's instructions.**

**In II Timothy we read God is faithful when we are unfaithful because God cannot deny His – Her own nature.**

**We are all spiritual beings leading someone somewhere.**

**Leaders that focus on the weaknesses of others develop followers. Leaders that focus on the strengths of others develop leaders. Leaders who gather followers need to be needed. Leaders who develop leaders want to be succeeded by other leaders. Leaders that develop leaders focus on the top line, the vision, not the bottom line. They lead in faith and focus on the best potential leaders, not the loudest and most difficult people. Leaders who gather followers treat everyone the same. Dynamic leaders treat people as individuals.**

**Leaders who gather followers *spend* their time while leaders who grow leaders *invest* their time. Leaders who gather followers ask for little commitment, while leaders who**

**develop leaders ask for great commitment. And lastly, leaders who gather followers impact this generation, while leaders who develop leaders impact future generations.**

**Abraham learned his lesson. He learned to trust God even when he did not understand how God was going to keep his promise and make him the father of nations. Sarah was barren and they were blue haired and blued legged but Abraham trusted God and apparently lived into his trust because Sarah became pregnant, I'm just sayin!**

**Abraham learned to walk what he talked. Folks, I am committed to develop leader's one person at a time. Last year I spent a great deal of invested time one on one and in a group mentoring six people. All six persons have risen into leadership roles in our church. I am going to ask each of these**

people to mentor one person this year. I am going to take six new people away on a weekend leadership retreat and talk about leadership and making a great commitment for this next year. We are creating teams on our Council by first becoming a strong ministry team. Beginning this Tuesday and then on every Tuesday all of you are invited to join our staff from 10 to 11 am as we pray and explore the Scripture text for the next Sunday. I want to hear what you hear from the Spirit as we read and discuss the texts. I want to catch your insights and excitement as you engage with one another about how the texts are relevant to your lives. I want us to live into the vision and mission God has and is unfolding among us as we walk what we talk. So today, I am asking us, "What are we thinking, assuming and talking about? Or how are we trusting and living in grace and what are we communicating with one

**another about? I promise you one thing...we are all walking what we are talking and if you and I, if we are going nowhere, if we are causing consequences on those around us instead of blessings, we need to stop in our tracks and change the way we think, move and have our being in God. Like the Sacred, I am a servant leader who is not interested in popularity or being liked, I am interested in becoming more like the One who created all of us and in mentoring others to rise up and lead. I am purposely placing one foot in front of the other beginning with walking in today's Pride Parade. I am proud to be a human being on the planet who is capable of giving and receiving love. The truth is, the promise land is always now if we will just believe.**

**A "true" story that Billy Graham delivered in a sermon.**

**It is a story about trusting God even when we can't see what's ahead for us.**

**There was a man who became shipwrecked on a deserted island years ago. He managed to build himself a hut to live in and with it stored the possessions he was able to salvage from his boat after it was wrecked.**

**He would watch every day for some sign of a ship or airplane passing by. He prayed to God for help. Some days he would get discouraged and wonder if he would ever get off that island, but still ... he prayed.**

**One day he was on the other end of the island and noticed some smoke coming from the direction of his hut. He ran as fast as he could back to the hut and**

**then he realized that his fears had come true. His hut and all his belongings were destroyed by a fire. All that was left was the smoke and rubble of it all.**

**He asked God why did this have to happen? He did not understand. Soon he would find out. Later that day a ship appeared on the horizon and soon landed on the island and rescued him. They told him that they were plotting a distinct course and noticed smoke off in the distance and thought the smoke was a signal for help.**

**It was a sign for much needed help and it was a sign from God that He was still in control and He would not forsake His beloved child even if there was a doubt or not.**

**Out of the ashes of this life we can build another day!**

**It is an interesting fact that most shipwrecks happen when they are tied to a dock during a storm.**

**May we rise out of the ashes of yesterday and make something new under the sun. May we dare to love and live greatly. Amen.**