

## Minister's Message 4-29-2020

Hello everyone! This is Pastor Melinda from Shiloh UCC. Each week I am enjoying our time together. I am not trying to be a serious scholar with these talks. I am more concerned with finding hope through devotion and simple reflection on scripture. The midweek meditation I have been sharing with you usually comes from one of our upcoming scripture readings. This week is a bit different. I would like to share with you one of Sophia's favorite Bible stories.

Before I share the story, let me tell you a bit about her "Bible." When Sophia was baptized, she received a baby Bible, called "Her First Bible."<sup>1</sup> Every evening, before Sophia goes to bed, after we have read two or three books (some new ones that the members of Shiloh UCC gave her), she has to look at an image in her baby Bible. She loves the picture. The image shows Abraham, Sarah, and baby Isaac in the desert, following God's guidance. There is a little poem on the other page that I read for Sophie almost every evening:

*"Abraham heard God call,  
And though he felt small,  
He left his homeland  
To be father of all."*

Sophie loves the picture and the poem, she knows the names of Isaac and Sarah. She can't pronounce Abraham yet, but she is seriously trying... When I look at the image, it reminds me of the difficult times we are going through right now. It reminds me of the spiritual "desert" we have to walk through, not knowing what the Promised Land will look like on the other side.

Each night, I enjoy seeing the look the hope on Abraham's face, as he gazes into the future. I never get tired of seeing the love and closeness between mother and baby. The little lamb at their feet just makes the whole image totally cute and deeply biblical at the same time.

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<sup>1</sup>Her First Bible: Little Stories for Little Hearts by Melody Carlson, Zondervan 2002.

But let me go back to the beginning of Abraham's story for a moment. If you look up the story in the Bible, Genesis Chapter 12 is where you want to start. These are the first few verses of Genesis 12:

*1 The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.*

*2 "I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;*

*I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing..."*

My family left New Hampshire to go on a new journey. Like Abraham, we have followed God's call to come serve Shiloh UCC. I am grateful to serve you, and to be a part of this spiritual community, especially during these scary times.

Abraham's obedience was rewarded by blessings. Abraham went where God was leading him, and God showered blessings on Abraham's life. Even before Isaac was born, Abraham received a promise from God: "I will make you into a great nation." Abraham didn't know how that would be possible, but he trusted God's word.

Today, when we are going through this "desert," this scary Coronavirus epidemic, it's encouraging to look at Abraham's story. When we trust God and know that God will take care of us, God blesses us and helps us be a blessing in other people's lives.

Even while we are social distancing, we can share God's love with each other. There are so many people at Shiloh UCC who are sharing love with their neighbor. Even when services have to be conducted online, people are donating generously. Thank you for remembering to give, even when we don't pass the basket. Shiloh UCC will be rewarded for their sacrifices during a time of uncertainty.

There are people who cook meals for those who are going through difficult times. There are people who check on others, especially the elderly, making sure they have everything they need. There are people who are making facemasks for others. Thank you for your generosity.

Our family received handmade facemasks, too, and we are very grateful for them. Even in the most difficult times, we can become blessings to our neighbor. Even when we are going through a scary and unknown “desert experience”, even when we are going through the “valley of the shadow of death”, we can bless others, because God has blessed us.

Tancrede and I feel like Abraham and Sarah sometimes. We feel so blessed that God gave us Sophia. Our little baby is now helping us re-examine scripture in light of the present moment. Sophie is pointing me at some beautiful Bible stories, that I haven’t thought about lately from a perspective I never held. I see things differently now that I am a mother.

I have been blessed; and I hope I am sharing my blessings, my positive experience with all of you. I hope that my life will bless all of you who call Shiloh UCC their spiritual home.

So, no matter what you are going through right now: keep the faith, trust God, and know that I am praying for you. God loves you and wants to bless you. You are a beloved and cherished child of God, and you are precious in God’s eyes. Like Sarah and Abraham, let’s gather all the precious saints of God, and journey to the Promised land together.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

**Let us pray!** God of all blessings, we thank you for everything we have and all the people in our lives. We thank you for the beauty of spring; the warmth of the sun and blooming trees. The Coronavirus can’t stop Spring. The Coronavirus can’t stop the beauty of your creation: and it surely cannot stop us from becoming blessings in other people’s lives.

Help us be your trusting children. Help us learn from Abraham’s obedience and follow your ways. Today we also intercede for everyone who needs your special care and attention. We pray for those who are suffering in body, mind, or spirit. We pray that you keep our first responders healthy. We pray for immunity and healthy constitutions.

We pray also for the lonely and those who feel lost. Send us out to find your suffering children. Send us out to become your gentle and loving hands and feet in this world.

Bless this world with your healing touch. Grant us immunity but also stop the spread of the Coronavirus. Give us hope for the future that we will be able to get together again in your name. Bless our spiritual home, Shiloh UCC, that we may feel that we all belong together, even if we can't be together physically. Bless our homes with peace, joy, and harmony. Bless us so that we may also become blessings. We pray all this in the name of our Resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Hymn: #460** God Will Take Care of You

Thank you for listening. Tomorrow, Thursday morning at 10:00 AM come and chat with me on the site that we will e-mail out to you.

**Benediction:** And now, go in peace and may the peace of God fill your hearts always. Amen.