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**Lent 2 Genesis 15. 1-12**

I remember as a kid my parents bought us a telescope. It was in the 70's and I guess they were inspired by all the Apollo moon missions. And I remember one night looking up at the moon and being convinced that I could see all the equipment that the astronauts had left behind – moon buggies and space craft - and being absolutely crushed because when I told them and they laughed at me – it's probably why I am not an astronomer today.

In Genesis today Abraham is getting a lesson in astronomy as he too looks up at the heavens. Now this is near the beginning of the story of Abram who later we better know as Abraham – God has appeared to him already and has told him to leave his home and go to a new land that will be given to him and to all of his children.

God has promised that he will have so many children, so many descendants that it would be easier to count the “all the specks of dust on earth” (Gen 13.16). Now Abram has believed God and has already made a journey of faith and traveled a long way but there is a problem – Abram is getting on. He already has his Gold Card – he was 75 when he left to go to this new land – that's a heck of an age to emigrate – and Sarai his wife is 65 – and it doesn't look likely that they are having children anytime soon.

So now God appears to Abram again and promises to look after him and give Abram a great reward – and for the first time Abram speaks and says “what good will that do? I have no children and when I die by default all my property will go to my slave Eliezer.”

And so God leads him out of his tent and has him look up at the sky. “Try to count the stars – you will have more descendants than there are stars.” And we are told that Abram put his trust in the Lord and believed.

Now, I didn't have time to count the stars before I came here today but fortunately I read someone who had made a good effort

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at counting them – there are approximately 100 billion stars in the Milky Way alone – put another way – if you were to hold up a dime at arms length against the night sky you would block out – if your eyes could see with such power - 15 million stars from your view.<sup>1</sup>

Well, I don't have that vision and neither apparently has Abram for we are told that later when the Lord appears to him again and says "I am the Lord who led you out of Babylonia to give you this land as your own". And Abram doubts and cannot see the greater reality beyond his own and cannot share God's perspective and he gives a very human answer saying "how can I know that this will be mine?"

Now at this point in the story seems to get very strange - we have Abram cutting animals in half and placing the pieces opposite each other in rows and then this very strange and scary scene of the vultures coming down to get the meat and Abram fighting them off with his staff –the sun going down.

We have Abram falling into a deep sleep and the smoking fire pot that passes between the animals and the mysterious words Then and there God made a covenant with Abram – "I promise to give to your descendants all this land..."

What is happening here is that God is making a covenant – in Abram's day, this is how you did it – each party of the covenant would cut the animals into two parts and then each person would walk in between the two halves to seal the agreement – the words that each person spoke were "If I should break my covenant may what has happened to these animals happen then to me." In a very real sense it was "cutting a contract."

In this scene, the presence of God in the form of a smoking torch passes in between to seal the covenant. From that day on, Abram had for his comfort a "proof" of the promises that God had made to him.

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Pages 35-6

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Abram may be a great man of faith but he's also a human being asks for a proof of the covenant and promise that was made. And as you recall, later, years later, God honours that promise with the birth of Isaac – when Abraham was 100 and Sarah, a young mother of 90.

Many more years, later, Paul would points out that thanks to Abraham's faith we are included as their descendants.

Today's story is about faith. The journey of faith is believing in the things we cannot see and in the God who sends us on that journey. In this story of faith, we learn something of the graciousness of God who accepted the faith of Abram even if that faith was imperfect and at times it wavered and who will accept our offering of faith even if it sometimes wavers as well.

This story tells of a God who is kind enough to stoop down to our level and was willing to make a covenant with Abram in order to reassure him with some mark of proof that he would be faithful. This same God, has done the same for in the person of Jesus Christ who stooped down to our level by putting aside his glory to become one of us.

This Christ who calls you to be his disciple and promises eternal life to you if you can have faith in him – even if our faith like Abram's isn't always perfect. And this same God makes a covenant with us as well – who longs to make us free from slavery of sin and make us his children – and who asks us to believe that through our faith in him our past mistakes and sins are forgiven and nailed to the cross and are forgiven and forgotten there.

And if ever our faith is weak at times like the faith of Abram and we need to have some proof of that wonderful promise – then we can look at the marks of that contract -a contract which was also cut and signed – only this time into the hands and feet and of Jesus Christ.