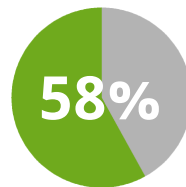


JOURNALS POSTED ON MAY 23, 2018

A wandering Aramean was my father...



STAN SLADE



SUPPORT PLEDGED



I was in Paradise on Pentecost.

Really.

Barbara sang like an angel. Alberto prayed fervently. Saúl and Rosie welcomed us graciously.

In the next room down the Paradise Baptist Church hallway, Aaron—the servant of God whose vision had led to the experience I was enjoying with Rosie, Saúl and the rest—Aaron was bringing his ministry to a close.

God had used Aaron's father to begin Paradise Baptist Church as a fellowship group in the home of an African American family in 1944. What has been called the Second Great Migration was in full swing, and African American families were flowing out of the American South in response to opportunities in the West, Midwest and North. Over the years, the congregation grew and engaged in a wide range of ministries, launched from its location at 51st and Broadway, in South Central Los Angeles.

A generation later, Aaron saw the neighborhood around the church changing, as a steady stream of people from Mexico, Central and South America came to the city. God gave him a vision to reach beyond the congregation's core African American membership to meet the needs of the new arrivals. So, in the mid-1980s, Paradise Baptist Church gave birth to what is now *Iglesia Paraíso* International Ministries (where even the name is a Spanish-English mix!). The churches share a building and more. A bit later on that Pentecost Sunday, they would all come together as one to celebrate God's faithful work in their midst.

I'm glad I had a chance last weekend to catch at least a brief glimpse of this cross-cultural/multi-cultural/international/local mission (twenty years ago, we tried out "glocal" as a descriptor for this, but it didn't catch on!). I was at *Paraíso* to encourage the Spanish speaking (and, yes, Spanglish speaking) congregation.

I was powerfully struck by the connection they share with Abraham. In Jesus, we have all been made daughters and sons of Abraham, of course. But immigrants have a special window on this reality. For, God did not call Abraham to operate from whatever power base his family had established long before in Ur, nor even more recently in Haran. Instead, God invited him to take the risk of becoming an immigrant. God called him to become a stranger in a strange land, in order both to receive God's blessing and to become a channel of blessing to others (Genesis 12:1-3).

Yes, God chose Abraham. But not for a position of privilege and power. Rather, he and his descendants were to serve as a special connecting link to make God's gracious ways visible and tangible, for all peoples (Exodus 19:1-6). Their national spiritual center was to be a house of prayer "for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7). And, when things went well for them in the place they settled, they were to resist the temptation to assume a privileged, self-centered view of themselves (Deuteronomy 8:11-20). Instead, they were called always to remember, "a wandering Aramean was my father... and we suffered as slaves... and God rescued us" (Deuteronomy 26:5ff).

The call to launch into the unknown and to find one's own blessing in becoming a blessing to those who are very different was not just a call to Abraham. It is a call renewed in Jesus and driven by the power of the Holy Spirit. On the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, the Spirit of God spoke through Jesus' followers in a way that demonstrated God's desire to meet every human family on their own turf, to share the truth about Jesus with them in their own heart language.

For Jesus' followers (just as for Israel before us), it has been far too easy to forget the message of Pentecost, and the connection we have in Jesus to the calling of Abraham. It has been far too easy and common to regard the gracious gift of God as something just for us. (Or perhaps for **us plus**: those who are willing to become like **us**, those willing to come and join **us**.) We forget the purposes of God that go beyond ourselves, stretching out to include all human families (and indeed, the whole created order). Similarly, we forget that Abraham was called to become an immigrant, a resident alien, a sojourner—and even a refugee. We forget that immigrants have a special place in God's heart and in God's work in the world.

Strangely, this forgetfulness happens to followers of Jesus even in the U.S., despite the fact that we are **all** immigrants here. Yes, nearly as we can tell at the moment, Native Americans had a 15-20,000 year head start on everybody else. But they came from Asia. All the rest of us came a **lot** more recently. All of us, if we trace our lineage back just a few generations, find our roots in some other land—and often, some other language. One would think our immigrant heritage and status would help American followers of Jesus to remember God's bigger picture for us. Sadly, we too often let the recurring waves of anti-immigrant fear-mongering that have washed across American society since the 1790s carry us along with them. Like now.

God's word to the Israelites ("love the foreigners... for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt" Deuteronomy 10:19) should prick the conscience of all Americans, as a matter of simple integrity. But we who in Jesus have been grafted into Israel's story, we should be especially sensitive to it.

In Paradise on Pentecost, I was grateful for the vision, courage and tenacity of an African American pastor and congregants with a bigger vision of America and of their neighborhood. I was also grateful for the vision, courage and tenacity of the the Latina and Latino immigrants who have lived into it with them.

May we daily present our lives as offerings to the Lord with the awareness that "a wandering Aramean was my father...."

Blessings,
Stan

P.S. I am especially grateful for the outpouring of support for this ministry—thank you for the gifts and prayers that make my service in the Lord possible!! *If you have not yet given, there is still need. Please join us!!*