

I have lived my life always bumping up against weddings. In my younger life it was as musician, playing for weddings at church. In the last several decades of life it has been as pastor, officiating for weddings. Now with a wedding date imminent in our immediate household, I am bumping up against wedding things in new ways.

A lot has changed since Emily, and I married 30 years ago. Wedding trends keep trending. And what wasn't such a big deal on our wedding day, has suddenly become a very big deal. The "first look" is one such item. I remember meeting up with Emily at the church before anyone else arrived. It was a private moment. No one was there to document it. It remains forever in my mind. Now, please don't get me wrong, I am not knocking on wedding trends, I am just highlighting how things change. Now, as wedding things are discussed in detail, I am aware of how important "first looks" really are. It is, I suppose, a first glimpse into something that is about to unfold. I life yet to come.

We just got back from Lake Week. Lake Week is central to my wellbeing. Lake Week occurs in the last week of July. It has been that way for over 30 years. Our best friends invite us to spend a week with them, at a simple rather primitive cottage, on a pristine lake. The dock serves as the compass point for that period. It is the place from which the rowboat, canoe, and paddleboards are launched. It is the place from which shrieks of delight are heard as children and adults jump off into the crystal-clear water. The dock provides the stable footing needed when casting a line into the water to catch fish early in the morning or in the early evening light.

With the setting of the sun, the dock serves as a bridge between the surface of the water and the night sky. With unobstructed views stars appear overhead. A first glimpse, a first look at the changing sky brings excitement, awe, wonder, expectation, as constellations begin to emerge in the night sky. The Big Dipper, the band of Orion's Belt, Polaris and the Little Dipper, all twinkling in a field of midnight blue. In time you experience the full impact of that first look. Often it overwhelms me as I stand on the dock gazing at the night-time sky.

Abram was brought out into the night sky. ***God said to him "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be."*** Excitement, awe, wonder, expectation, a first glimpse and then the full impact of generosity, joy, and thanksgiving, ***And Abram believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.*** Such was the affirmation from an old man with a wife who was barren. I am not sure if Abram began to count one by one pointing at each star or grouping them together in chunks from the vast expansive universe. But I do know that a fearful old man had his life transformed, had hope restored. That night there was a first look at what life would be in relationship with God.

The story of course includes a detour with Abram not heeding the Word of the Lord but heeding his wife Sarai who thought that time was running out and that they should try and help God out a bit. (How many of us think that we need to help God out from time to time? The Frank Sinatra hit always comes to mind "I did it my way!") That didn't work out so well for Abram and Sarai. She recommends gaining an heir through a different means than through the promise made to Abram that night under the star lit sky. When Sarai's plan fails leading to jealousy and sorrow, God visits them.

Now Abram nearly 100 years old and Sarai nearly 90 hear God announcing a timeframe different from their own. God assured Abram that death was not the end of the line for the two elderly followers. Faithfulness, waiting and trusting, in the end would win out and they would have a child, an heir, their very own offspring, a son. And in that moment God changed their names forever to be known as Abraham and Sarah. ***She will give rise to nations; kings and of peoples shall come from her who would be named Isaac.*** Later, nine months or so after laughing about an old couple becoming parents, Sarah gave birth to a son. They named him Isaac.

A next generation was not only desired but was required in the ancient world. Without the next generation it would be the end of the line, the end of a promise, the end of blessing for others, the end of hopes and dreams. As the story unfolds in the book of Genesis it is belief that mattered. Abraham and Sarah's impatience, or lack of trust, or desire to do it their own way, did not thwart God's time. Abraham believed God. God did what God said he would do making a way forward even at an advanced age.

Maybe you have come to a place in your life like that? A place where it seems that there isn't a way forward and that you have come to the end of the line, and with that thought, hopes and dreams are squelched. If you are secretly saying "yes I have," then take comfort knowing that you are not alone. Christian people have meandered down that road often enough that the New Testament writers have taken up the topic to visit us with an assuring Word. This Word comes to us making a way by securing our footing, centering our lives, launching out with renewed purpose, hearing a forgiving word freeing us for joyful living. Christ Jesus, the Child of Christmas, the Word, comes to us. He comes among us to right wrongs, making a way for faithful living, bridging all that separates us from God. With him there is excitement, awe, wonder, expectation, generosity, joy, and thanksgiving associated with life. He makes a way restoring hopes and dreams and promising eternal life. Christ is central to faith. Faith is central to well-being. Christ is the compass point for centering our lives of faith; our going out and our coming in, our shrieks of joy and delight and our shrieks of lament in times of sorrow. Christ provides a stable footing as we proclaim love in words and in acts of kindness.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen. Faith, it seems is not immediate. We only must think back on Abraham. Faith doesn't seem to keep pace with trends, the speed at which our fatigued culture moves. Faith has always found itself swirling around in an environment dominated by immediate gratification. Think back on Sarah. The fast-paced forces advancing a culture of instant delight continue to gain traction and imbed itself in our culture. Most days with the impatience, or lack of trust, or desire to do it our own way, it is almost impossible to imagine something different, something other, something lodged deep within God's time. And at just such a time Christ comes reminding us of his promise to us through Baptism's water and word and communion's bread and wine. And like Abraham, we believe.

Standing on the dock as the sun sets and the night sky begins to shimmer with evening lights, it offers a glimpse, a first look at something vast and marvelous, the created order. I marvel at the expanse, the beauty, the stillness, and the quiet. As a Christian it is the Bright Morning Star, Christ Jesus, who promises us life and a future that is unimaginable. Perhaps that is what wedding photographers hope to capture in a "first look" when couples see each other in

wedding light, a future that is unimaginable. Long ago when God brought Abraham outside and said, ***“look toward the heaven and count the stars if you are able to count them.”*** God promised an old man and a barren woman a future that was unimaginable. It was a first look. And Abraham believed God. Amen.