

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Oct 19th 2013

The readings for today made me think about my mother's family. I have been thinking about that family history a lot lately because of some genealogy work I did for the Kansas State Historical Society to accompany a quilt I recently donated on behalf of a family member's estate. My mother's family history goes all the way back to England and is well detailed from 1635 when the Puritan pastor, the Reverend Peter Hobart shows up in Massachusetts to establish a new faith community.

That was thirteen generations ago and I know something interesting about every generation in between Peter Hobart and me. It's all documented in American history and recorded in family bibles. But those stories are pretty insignificant compared to the story of Abraham and his descendants recorded in the Hebrew family bible. And while I can't prove that I am a direct descendant of Abraham, I can claim to be. And I believe that my family story is also recorded in the Hebrew bible.

Being a descendant of a Puritan pastor doesn't have anything to do with who I am and little to do with my faith. Being a descendant of Abraham does have a lot to do with it. All I really have in common with Peter Hobart is the fact that we both claim to be descendants of Abraham and to follow the faith of Abraham. In that sense, we are both part of a much larger lineage and a much richer heritage. It isn't about Peter Hobart's descendants or the quilts created by some of them that survived five generations and ended up in a museum. It is about a covenant that has been binding for a thousand generations, the story of which is told in every Judeo-Christian family, including mine. And while I was faithful to the last will and testament of my mother's cousin who left a quilt made by my great-great-grandmother to me with the understanding that I would donate it to the appropriate museum, I have a much greater obligation to uphold the deal Abraham made with the Lord on behalf of all of his descendants. It is more important to keep the story of God's covenant with Abraham alive than the story of the Hobart family in America.

It is true that Reverend Peter Hobart was a famous, early American as were many of his descendants who were pastors, soldiers in the Revolutionary War, theology professors, and elected government officials. But he was no one compared to Abraham who was the father of kings, carpenters, fishermen, weavers, shepherds, prostitutes and tax collectors. That lineage includes every profession known to men and women who follow the faith of Abraham. Reflecting on the readings today while thinking about my mother's family history really helps me to grasp what it means for Abraham to be my father in the sight of God. It helps me to think about my inheritance in greater terms than just some material effects and a good name. Coming from faith-filled people who were committed to family and community values is nice but it has nothing to do with righteousness. The inheritance for which I am most blessed and most grateful is the gift of faith.

And even though I have no children of my own and very little in the way of material things that anyone would want to inherit from me, I do hope to pass on the rich gift of faith I possess through the covenant God made with Abraham. I do hope I will leave behind a good name, but only if it is based on

evidence that I followed my faith, not because I adhered to the law or was a famous person (failed on both counts). To illustrate this, I share a story I read in my family's history about an Illinois frontier great-great-great-great grandmother's 97th birthday party. It was said that Keziah Hobart sang "All Hail the Power of Jesus's Name" acapella for the guests who gathered in her log cabin. Then she smoked her pipe.

Surely, she was just as important in handing down the faith of Abraham as the Reverend Peter Hobart. Today I give thanks for her and hope I will be remembered in much the same way (except for the pipe!)

Barbara Dilly