

You should never assume. You know the adage: it makes an a-s-s out of “u” and “me”. And when it comes to making assumptions about God, only you become the fuzzy quadruped.

Abraham had a long and prosperous relationship with Yahweh. He was given wealth, wives, and two sons who live forever in the faith stories of three major religions. Abraham didn't have to promise anything to God to receive these riches. God's covenant with Abraham was all God's idea. Remember, it was only God who 'walked' through the bifurcated bodies of the animals in the form of flaming torch. God put it all on the line for Abraham.

In their relationship, it was a given that there would be negotiation. It was a given that Abraham would push back against divine decrees if there was good reason. The city of Sodom had Abraham and his haggling skills to thank for its survival. Good friends ask hard questions when its necessary.

However, Abraham tested God's patience. To save his own skin, he convinces Sarah to say to Pharoah that she was his sister. Pharoah ends up with plagues because he'd taken Sarah into his court. Abraham gets his wife and all his riches back and is sent on his way.

You would think this would be enough for Abraham, and Sarah too. But, no. They become impatient.

Here – says Sarah – take my slave girl from Egypt and have a son with her. No push back from Abraham there! And, as the fruit of her decision becomes obvious, Sarah’s cruelty becomes overt. Not only does she send Hagar away during the pregnancy, Sarah sends Hagar and Ishmael away after Isaac is born. Abraham gives no argument either time. He just assumes that his magical, wonderful, relationship with God is going to save the day.

It started that day at Mamre. The three beings stop for shelter in the heat of the day. The code of hospitality kicks in and Abraham invites them to stay and then activates the catering staff, including his long-suffering wife. The promise of a son to Sarah comes with hilarity. At the ripe age of 100, Abraham has his precious son at last. Life is good. Abraham has his heir. Sarah has her son. God’s in his heaven and all is right with the world.

Not so much.

God sees the terror of Hagar. God sees the suffering of Ishmael. God sees the cruelty of Sarah. God sees the indifference of Abraham. Do these two really think that they are so blessed, so privileged, that nothing can go badly for them? Do they think that their special, personal relationship with God will keep them from all harm?

“Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and offer him as a burnt offering.”
God says.

“Okay.”

OKAY???????

Excuse me? I am the mother of an only son. While there were moments when I wanted to strangle him, causing his death was never an option. How could anyone kill their child? Especially one born miraculously. Especially one that was promised. The minute they emerge from the womb you know that you would die for your child. If this had happened to me, I’d have found another deity to worship.

And, poor Sarah. Given that child sacrifice was likely still being practiced by some of the neighboring cultures, what else could she have imagined when she saw Abraham loading wood on the back of Isaac and trotting him a mountain? If you listen, you can hear her wailing behind the parade on Mt. Moriah.

“We’ll be back.” Abraham says. “We?” Does that mean you and the servants, Abe? Does it mean you and Isaac? Are you so convinced of your invincibility and this “magical relationship with God” that you will bind the future of your people and serve him flambe to the God you worship without even so much as a “hold on just a minute here!” Really Abe? Really?

The covenant between God and Abraham may be in place, but the personal connection is over. Abraham's cocksure attitude destroyed it. It's so over that God didn't personally interfere with the sacrificial act – God sent an angel to save the day. God couldn't be bothered. Abraham failed.

Abraham failed to be thankful. Abraham failed to understand God's actions as grace and took them for granted. He and Sarah refused to wait patiently for what had been promised them and took matters into their own hands, resulting in created great suffering. They failed to treat Hagar and Ishmael with dignity. He failed to challenge what should have been challenged.

Abraham refused to see what the covenant cost God.

Abraham refused to see the vulnerability God offered.

Perhaps that's why Jesus sent his disciples out with the bare minimum, so that they would have an inkling of what strength of faith one needs to be vulnerable. Perhaps that's why hospitality figured so much in his words of wisdom to them. To welcome someone requires vulnerability on your part because those you welcome are vulnerable.

It requires vulnerability to each other to begin to be reconciled with each other. It takes effort to find the cool water of justice to give to a thirsty world.

Now, more than ever, God is calling us to be vulnerable to each other. This is the time to listen to the stories of the lives of people we thought we knew. It is time

to sit and welcome to our ears and hearts and souls the tales that will be hard for us to hear. We'll need to be vulnerable and open. We'll need to ask forgiveness – even if what we hear isn't our direct fault.

God is offering us a cold drink to we little ones. It comes from a deep place near the center of Love itself. It is living water.

Drink up. And, never forget its cost to our Creator.

Amen.