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 Proper 14B: Genesis 15:1-6
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Many of y'all know that last week the Bonner-Stewarts
 drove back from the girls' summer camp.
 On the drive back here, we visited family in the Carolinas.
 We also stopped at Gettysburg, Hershey Park, and Niagara Falls,
 traveling more than 1500 miles in a week and half.

Abraham, from our first reading, is a traveler, too,
 though no one would call his jaunts summer road trips.
 In chapter 12, three chapters before the one we heard read for today,
 God asks Abram and his family to travel,
 though their trip is better categorized as a move.
 Abram is asked to leave his homeland
 w/ his wife Sarah and his nephew Lot.
 And they do.

They pick up and go in a day and age
 where many people never traveled far from where they were born,
 generally speaking, let alone actually moved away.
 They go from present day Israel-Palestine to Egypt.

One of the greatest ways Abraham explored had nothing to do
 with where he and Sarah traveled, though.
 Abram is one of the first people the Bible details
 as exploring a long term relationship with God.
 God and Abraham have multiple encounters and interactions,
 and their relationship evolves and changes .
 Some really great explorations happen
 without actually going anywhere.

Today I want to talk about, explore, if you will, a component of Abraham
 & God's relationship that is rarely discussed— Abraham's curiosity.
 Abraham is often painted as the model of obedience,
 beginning with his picking up and going here & there
 when God says so with shockingly little explanation.

Many folks believe that when God says jump, Abraham says how high.
 And while there is certainly some truth to that,
 Abraham's character is, fortunately,
 much more complicated than that, thank God.

Most famously, Abraham goes back and forth with God in Genesis 18,
 Questioning God about the advisability
 of punishing the righteous alongside the wicked.

Abraham also questions God in the passage Cecile read for us today.
 Abraham is essentially saying,
 "Hey, God. What's going on?
 This kid I don't actually consider family is my heir! I mean, hello?"
 And God says to Abraham,
 "Your descendants will number the stars."

Earlier, in chapter 12, God offhandedly mentions Abraham's "offspring."
 Then all of these things happen, nothing of which have anything to do with kids.
 They go to Egypt, Abraham and his nephew Lot
 have this big fight and separate,
 Abraham then learns Lot is in trouble and goes to rescue him.
 No mention of children. No even false alarms of kids.

Today God reassures Abraham.
 God does not revoke promises because Abraham dares to ask for clarification.
 God reassures. God paints this incredible picture of
 Abrahams's descendents numbering the stars.
 It's beautiful. It's an also image we may not have gotten
 if Abraham hadn't asked for clarification.

At the same time, Abraham receives no when, no where, no how.
 Abraham is not given much in the way of evidence.
 But b/c of his curiosity, Abraham manages to regain his hope.
 Abraham's curiosity bolsters his ability to hope.

It's important to note that Abraham both does and does not see the promise fulfilled.
 Abraham does end up having two children— Ishmael and Isaac.
 Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac has 2 sons—
 twins Jacob and Esau.

Ishmael, Abraham's first son, with Hagar as his mother,
 has 13 children— 12 sons and a daughter.
 We don't know if Abraham knew this or not.
 15 grandchildren, 2 children.
 Not exactly the # of stars in the sky.

Today the People of the Book, Jews, Christians, and Muslims,
 all consider Abraham to be one of their,
 one of our, incredibly important ancestors.
 He's sometimes called a patriarch, meaning father.
 His descendents do, in fact, number the stars.

The promise is fulfilled,
 though it takes an incredibly long time to come to fruition.
 The promise is fulfilled,
 though Abraham does not get to see it in his lifetime,
 not even close.

Most people throughout history, including our ancestors in the faith,
 lived with vast amounts of instability and change.
 And yet if they did not continue to hope in some way,
 maybe not every single day, not in a blindly optimistic sort of way
 but still hope sometimes.
 Would we even be sitting here today?
 If no one had bothered to write anything down?
 Outcomes only feel inevitable in retrospect...

Hope is not about what we feel
 Hope is about what we do.
 Planting trees.
 Fostering kittens.
 Carrying Nar-Can & knowing how to use it.
 Some days hope is just hanging in there,
 nothing more, nothing less.

Like Abraham, curiosity and hopefulness can coexist,
 can even mutually reinforce one another,
 and that, beloveds, is a journey worth taking if we can. Amen.