

God's Promise

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 12:1-4a

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

Have you ever wondered if God has made a promise to you? Have you wondered whether God has a call on your life? Have you been afraid that you have missed your opportunity to respond to God's call? Our scripture this morning can be good news for you!

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him." This is how we are introduced to the patriarch of three faith traditions: "so Abram went." Chapters 10 and 11 of Genesis move us through a long genealogy from Noah's son, Shem, to Terah the father of Abram, making only a brief detour through the tower of Babel story. As we approach our scripture, we discover that Abram has two brothers, one of whom dies in Ur of the Chaldeans, leaving a surviving son named Lot. We know nothing of Lot's mother. Abram "takes a wife," Sarai, who is barren, "for she has no child." Finally, Abram's father, Terah, dies in Haran and is buried there.

We then read that God tells Abram to go to a place he has never been before—go from your country, go from your kin, go from your father's house—go, and I will show you where. So Abram goes. We know so

little about this man. We know nothing of his pedigree, his credentials or qualifications. Was Abram a righteous man as was Noah? We are not told. Why would God call him? The text is silent on these matters, so we do not know—yet, we do.

We know the ways of God through our experience of God today. In the callings of others to both lay and ordained service, we can see God's method at work. We see that God does not always call those with the best credentials or the shining pedigrees. We see, again and again, that a faithful response to God's leading results in a blessing of gifts and talents, of learned and acquired skill sets sufficient for the task to which an individual is called. God calls and Abram responds faithfully. The author of Hebrews writes that because Abram considers the maker of the promise to be the keeper of promises, he responds faithfully and receives the power of procreation and the skill set to become a great nation (Heb. 11:8-12).

The city Haran, from which Abram is called, means "highway" or "crossroads." God's call to Abram at this crossroads and Abram's faithful response is the starting point of Israel's history. We look around at the needs in our community and world. On Thursday I told a coworker about our Angel Tree ministry and how we are being called to respond to the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren. He reminded me we are called to make connections. He introduced me to a Detroitier who has a support group for these grandparents. If we truly minister to these

families is God calling us to be Sunday school teachers, elders, deacons, lay preachers, and individuals sensing a call to ordained ministry at this crossroad. God calls us to respond and challenges us to be faithful, individually and congregationally. In many ways and times we found ourselves at our own crossroads. Is God calling us to meet the needs and challenges of our congregation as well as the faithful response of our individual members to God's call. Perhaps God is calling us to a new starting points in the ministry of our church. But we ask...Do I have the time? Do I have the gifts and talents, the skill set for this task? Am I a "good enough" person to fill this role?

Our own experience and the witness of Scripture concur that the one who calls is the one who equips. The one who equips always leads the called to more complete expression of the persons they were created to be. Consequently, if the call is of God, the answer to all the above questions is yes. A faithful response is the embrace of what God has already called into being—a newness of being—and the release from what is known for what is promised. A faithful response is neither forced nor coerced, but a step freely taken toward our true selves.

The notion of embracing newness and relinquishing what has been connects this text with today's Gospel, the story of Nicodemus ([John 3:1-17](#)). To be born from above or anew or again may be understood as the embrace of God's calling—of one's true vocation—that necessitates taking leave of one's self-directed course. To leave the comfort of the

known for the promise of the unknown realities of God is a form of birth.

So Abram was born into a new reality that God called into being. Every new birth is a blessing, and every blessing holds the possibility of newness. God promises to make Abram a great nation and to bless him so that through Abram all nations will be blessed.

The notion of blessing may be understood in at least three ways. First, a blessing may be understood as a sense of well-being or the presence of peace in the life of the recipient. Such a blessing is especially effectual when it comes from someone of authority or power. An individual known to carry such a blessing is, in a sense, under the protection of its giver.

The gods of the Sumerian myths dispensed blessing through fertility and civilization. Many ancient traditions held that fertility was the activity of the gods. The story of Abram and Sarai certainly contains such elements. But the Old or First Testament of our Scriptures expands the concept of blessing to include a second understanding of created and cocreated blessings.

The God of Abram is the God of all creation. The whole of humanity is blessed by God's creation of the creatures of sky, field, and sea; the grains, vegetables, and fruits for harvest; and the system of sun, rain, soil, and wind that maintains them for our use and consumption. This blessing is expanded further for a third understanding that includes the

gifts, talents, and abilities—even biological abilities—that God bestows upon individuals. One of God's blessings to Abram and Sarai is to change the inability to bear children into the ability to be fruitful. In the whole of the First Testament, God blesses people with the drive and vitality to cocreate with God through discovery, invention, and productivity. The blessing of curiosity and creativity bestows upon humanity the power to create and acquire.

The faithful response of those who have gone before us has showered humankind with wealth, prosperity, freedom, creativity, and family beyond the imagination of Abraham the patriarch. God also calls us to go; will our response offer blessings to those who follow us? **Don P. Olsen**

For ancient Israel as for Jews today, and for those grafted into the chosen family through baptism, the whole point of being God's chosen ones has to do with God's decision to use special agents in order *to bring blessing to the broader human family* that mostly knows trouble and curse. "Blessed to be a blessing," as so many have phrased it, comes close to the full truth God declares at the beginning of Genesis 12. Audacious as it sounds, given the surrounding story, these verses suggest as well that Abram, Sarai, and their offspring actually serve as God's last hope for the world. If blessing fails to work, the alternatives are unthinkable, even for—especially for—God. **Frederick Niedner**

If our history reads, "So she went, as God told her," "So he went, as God told him," blessings will flow for generations beyond our faithful response. **Donald P. Olsen**

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A,
Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.