

Genesis 12: 1-4

12 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. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I 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.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Trinity Presbyterian Church

March 12, 2017

“Lent 2: Getting Grounded: Leaving and Blessing”

Intro: Think about home. You know the place where you kick your shoes off after a long day and exhale. The place where you feel comfortable and safe. Maybe when we think about home we imagine the place where we grew up. In the memory of our minds old homes from our childhood: the long games of hide and seek; riding our bikes to the convenient store. Maybe home is where you finally settled, began a family—where you planted a tree in the front yard watching the tree grow up to tower over the house. But you weren’t just planting a tree, you were also planting a life. You were making a home. Abram and Sarai have made a home. For the most part, it’s a good life—well established, settled down. But then God calls: it’s time to pack up. Time to leave.

Move 1: Our journey begins with an unsettling call: Time to leave. Even if we have lived in the same physical place for a long time, a life of faith called forth by God is anything but settled. Leave the comfortable place. Leave the role you’ve always played in the family, leave the familiar territory you love. In the ancient world the land, family and house formed one’s identity. Time to leave, says God. When we flip through the bible, we hear the same refrain to leave again and again. Israel needs to caravan through the wilderness for forty years to leave behind their identity as slaves from Egypt. God calls out to Moses, tell them it’s time to leave. In the New Testament, Jesus calls out to his disciples: leave your nets. Leave your father. Leave the tax booth. Leave what you are clinging to for your security. Leave the fear that is dragging you down. Leave the shame, pride and self-righteousness behind and follow me. God calls awaking something holy inside of them, but the call is to a life that is anything but settled. Time to leave.

Move 2: So picture how the conversation went with Sarai when Abram broke the news. “Honey, it is time to pack up all our belongings and head out on a new journey.” Her response seems obvious, “Well, okay...where are we going?” You can probably see the lines on her face when Abram tells her the answer: “I don’t know, but the Lord will show us.” Might imagine Sarai’s response being a lot like that of my friend’s parents, when he told them he was dropping out of school to travel Europe to “find himself.” They said: “Well, okay *but what’s the backup plan?*” If you think about it, the calling to Abram and Sarai is absurd. Abram is seventy-five years old. Sarai can’t get pregnant. Abram’s father is buried on the hill at the local cemetery. They have just about everything they could ever need; more livestock than they can count. It is a better than fair life. More, it is the place where they’ve made a home. But since

their story is about a journey of faith, there is no backup plan. All they get from God is an, “I’ll show you.”

Move 3: Well it is not the deal we were hoping for. Our human tendency is to stay put. We would like to know where the call is headed beforehand. *Then* we will make a decision about whether or not to go. If you’ve ever heard a seminary student talk about their journey, it is almost guaranteed you will hear them speak about how they dodged God’s call for a long time, until eventually God wore them down. Stories from ministers about how they finally surrendered to the calling once the kids grew up. Or we hear from the everyday parishioner who says they will volunteer more time when they retire, or the parent who says we can serve once the kids aren’t so young, or those who feel they are too old for God to use them. On the surface, they are all understandable reasons that make sense! But in the landscape of life, all of us think that once we get over the one hump—our project, our busy schedules, our loved one getting healthy—then a wonderful clearing will open up before us and then we can follow the call. But the truth is: once we get over the one hump there is always another hump right behind it. So the calling might not make a lot of sense. Might seem to come at the wrong time—and it might be the wrong time. But it might also be our human tendency to want to stay put, because in the moment we aren’t willing to leave something behind.

Move 4: But hold on! Did you catch God’s promise? It’s the grace along the way. “I will bless you.” God emptying God’s hands to offer grace along the way. Just like Jesus opening up his hands on the cross to open up a way for us. Notice God doesn’t say, “I will bless you and make you a great nation so you can put yourselves first.” God says, “I will bless you *so that in you* all people will be blessed.” To the families that can’t give their kiddos a decent education, “*in you* they will be blessed.” To the families whose refrigerators are empty, “*in you* they will have something to eat.” To the orphan who doesn’t have a home, “*in you* there will be a bed ready—a home.” Like when six year old Alex from New York wrote a letter to President Obama after the picture of Omar, the orphan Syrian boy sitting in the back of an ambulance, went viral. Alex wrote, “We will give him a family and he will be our brother.” Alex says, we will bless him. The calling inside our calling: at our homes, our jobs, our churches—every blessing we’ve gathered from our ordinary lives. All of it is given to us to be a blessing shared with others. It is the grace along the way. “I will bless you, *so that in you* all people will be blessed.”

Conclusion: Our call to faith is an unsettling call. God inviting us to leave whatever it is we are clinging to and follow. Perhaps by grace we can, so that with six year old Alex we say, we will bless them. They will be our sisters and brothers. We will be their family.