

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Blessed to Bless”

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Genesis 12: 1-9

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.’

4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, ⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. ⁹And Abram journeyed on by stages towards the Negeb.

There is an anonymous story from an old Reader’s Digest about the late Hungarian born pianist Andor Foldes. At the age of sixteen, the young man was recognized as a great talent, yet he was troubled so much in heart and soul that he contemplated quitting his music. One day another great pianist, Emil von Sauer came to Budapest and requested that Foldes play for him. VonSauer was the last surviving pupil of the great Franz Liszt. Foldes reluctantly agreed to play difficult works of Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann. When he had finished playing, von Sauer walked over to the young man, put his hands under his face and kissed him on the forehead. “My son,” he said, “when I was your age I became a student of Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson, saying, ‘Take good care of this kiss- it comes from Beethoven, who gave it to me after hearing me play.’ I have waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage, but now I feel you deserve it.”

For the next several weeks, the focus of our worship and hence the subject of my sermons will be stewardship. Perhaps that gives you some concern and you may already be thinking about alternative plans for Sunday mornings; after all no one likes to hear about money more than once or twice during the church year. But please notice that I said stewardship, a concept that includes yet is much wider than financial gifts to the ministry of the church. Stewardship is a personal spiritual practice. It is an act of faith. It is a response to the recognition of God’s call upon one’s life, one’s reason for being. It is an understanding that each of us is directed to do something important with that which we have been given and that the church can be a setting where those faithful actions take place. It is an understanding of what is asked or even required of us to pass on a sacred heritage.

The Scripture lesson is a familiar one from the book of Genesis. It is the story of the establishment of the covenant between God and Abram and Sarai, the beginning of the relationship based on the promise of God and faith of God’s people. Abram and Sarai are being

called or instructed to leave everything behind and to head toward a promise. They are told to go- out into nothing and with nothing other than this promise of God- that God will make a great nation of them and their children. They are being asked to leave a comfortable spot and risk accepting a challenge that will not always be comfortable. Abram is old. His wife Sarai is barren. It seems rather irrational. It seems awfully silly.

But then there was this additional tag attached to the promise. "I will bless you and make your name great," said God. That in itself must have been hard to understand. At that time, children and grandchildren were the sign of prosperity and hope. There was little chance that such a thing could happen for them. It would have been easy for Abram and Sarai to do as we are prone to do; worry about scarcity, limit ourselves with reality, and consider believing and acting on God's promise only when we are more secure and comfortable, only when we've first used our valuable resources to cover our own priorities. It would have been easy for them to stay home and enjoy what they already had.

Yet God offered Abram and Sarai blessings as part of a larger promise. Blessings will flourish if those blessings are used, not for one's own primary benefit but for God's benefit. Go from what is familiar and comfortable. There are realities greater than we now know and God will lead us there. You are blessed to bless others.

In their book *Bearing Fruit*, Lovett Weems Jr. and Tom Berlin speak of the most important two words in the Bible. They are "so that." God **so** loved the world **that** he gave his only Son. Make me a sanctuary **so that** I may dwell among them. Let your light shine before others, **so that** they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. The "so that" phrase describes God's action in Christ but also describes God's intention in the ultimate human response. In this story we hear it again, "You are blessed **so that** you will be a blessing for others." God's action is incomplete until we follow through on the "so that" part. God does not bless so we can be comfortable, content, rich, or secure. God blesses so that we become the presence of God by sharing of our blessings.

God offered the promise of blessing so that Abram would be a blessing. Here in this story we see and understand that God uses human agents like Abram and Sarai, like you and me, to pass on divine blessing. Today we might call them stewards- one who uses the blessings God has given to them to bless others and to do the work of God.

The ability to be a blessing takes the risk of faith. You must leave behind the very human need to make certain you have enough and give knowing somehow God will provide. You must let go of your desire to have everything planned and arranged before taking the journey into an unknown future. You must step away from your own desires and priorities and consider the higher priority that God places upon your time, your talent, your treasure, and your energy. Blessings are not to be enjoyed and stored securely. They are to be passed on and used to bless others.