

November 9 & 10, 2024

Lost in Translation | *Letting Go*

Genesis 12:1-5a

Pastor Sarah Fike

In the chapters of Genesis leading up to today's scripture, God struggled with a repeatedly rebellious, violent, and corrupt humanity as a whole: Eden story, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, the tower of Babel. As a result, God resolves to try a new strategy by focusing on one particular family among all the families of the earth.

However, as God often does, God decides to work through a most unlikely pair: old Abram and Sarai who will later become "Abraham" and "Sarah".

God chooses them for this long-term project of blessing the world even though we have been told in the previous chapter that Sarai is "barren" and unable to have children. God's project seems doomed to fail from the start. Yet God speaks a powerful and promising word into a barren family and a barren and conflicted world of humanity. The same powerful and divine word that created the world out of chaos at the beginning of creation may well now create a new hope and possibility yet again.

God's word to Abram begins with a command, "*Go from your country and your kindred and our father's house.*" God commands Abram to sever his ties to his larger nation, his ties to his larger kinship group, and finally even his ties to his immediate family or father's house (12:1). God calls Abram to a loyalty and commitment that transcends even his family ties, the most important of all relationships in the ancient world.

Abram is called.

When I started seminary, like all students starting seminary, you have to learn to get used to telling your call story. Now, you may start off by going into detail, but after the 100th time telling your call story, you start to condense it, giving only the somewhat important parts. Even to this day as you enter a new community, leaders in the church are still telling their call stories. People become so

interested in them...to see how a pastor is called to ministry. And it makes me wonder, how many times or places you have been in and asked to tell about your call story? What would you say? Would you talk about the events that led you to working at that specific place, that specific job? Would you tell about how you have progressed in life, you did it because you were following a call by God? Even more, do you think you are called by God?

Because I am here to tell you that you are called by God. In the same way that I am called by God. Each of us carries out that call in a different way so that we can share and build the kingdom of God through many avenues. So, I want to think together about our call – our call to proclaim the promises of God and to build the kingdom. A call heard in different ways, answered by different means, it's what brings us together in this place, in this time, and for this purpose. And so, we think we are the most unlikely people whom God would carry out this call, and yet we see the same unlikeliness in Abram and Sarai.

Because it is times such as these when we see hunger, hurt, pain, loneliness, violence in our world, that God reminds us to listen to those the world overlooks and overrides. Those disregarded and disempowered. Those rejected and reviled. Because *they* know what it means to answer God's call when doing so is not that easy, even impossible.

They know that at the heart of following God's call is the transformation from the impossible to the possible. To believe God's possibility when all we know in our world, in our lives, or what we have been told time and time again is impossibility.

When God commands these unlikely characters to leave everything that is safe, that is known, that is community for them, it is because God is going to have them play a central role in bringing about the Kingdom of God. Even more, God doesn't leave them high and dry. No....God's command, God's call comes with a powerful promise.

A three-part blessing, first, God promises Abram a "land that I will show you." Second, God promises

to make of Abram's offspring a great nation with the implication of a long line of descendants. Remember, Sarai's barrenness. Third, God promises to "bless" Abram. Blessing involves fertility, life, success, well-being, and a good name.

Part of this blessing is that God promises Abram to "make your name great." Which echoes, the tower builders in Genesis 11 building their tower with the purpose of making a name for themselves. Their self-centered and heaven-storming strategy led only to confusion and scattering. But now God promises to give Abram a great name as a gift with the purpose that "you will be a blessing". Abram and Sarai believed God's promise, so they went.

Let's unpack this a bit...

God's focus on one particular family was from the beginning designed to be the funnel for God's blessing to all the families of the earth. God's people may be tempted to turn inward, to worry only about their own survival, to consider themselves as God's only concern, or to ignore the wider community in which they live. Both in its words concerning all the families of the earth as well as its literary setting at the end of Genesis 1-11 which deals with all humanity, Genesis 12 reminds us that,

¹ *The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it (Psalm 24:1).*

Are we forgetting that Sarai is barren? God's selection of a barren husband and wife to be a blessing to others emphasizes that it is first and foremost God's power and initiative that will accomplish God's purposes. Paul writes in Romans 4, that Abram and Sarai's unwavering faith is "Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations,' according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.' Of course, human obedience is from the very beginning, God says, "Go..." and "Abram went." But Abraham's trust in God's commitment to fulfill the promises made provide the energy and will to follow God's commands.

God's election of the family of Abraham and Sarah as a chosen and special vehicle of God's blessing affirms God's continuing commitment to humans and the world in spite of their rebellion, violence and evil. God will not let go of God's creation.

Even more, the trust and obedience of Abram was so real that he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what God had promised."

So, what does this all mean for us being called, we might say, Abram's story gives witness to the very way God sees us when God calls us to work for the kingdom. From people who are wandering to having a place they call home. From a place where we see barrenness to a place that creates life and creates it abundantly. From God knowing that we will mistrust, go the wrong way to a God who will continually redirect us.

We are all called by God. It started with God seeing you. But now, more than ever, is the time to live God's call. Once you have been seen, it's hard, perhaps impossible, not to see others. And when others are seen, truly seen, for whom God has called them to be, there will be no holding back, by anyone, or anything, any religion, any administration, any organization, any denomination, any politician, any nation, any institution, the coming of the Kingdom of God. The journey in living out our calls may be long, sometimes much longer than one may have thought. And it is a journey with many ups and downs, many joys and sorrows. But it is a journey filled with many, many promises — the most important being the promise of God's presence to show us the way.