

2nd Sunday in Lent
Genesis 12:1-8
Sermon #1223
March 5, 2023
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12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Get out of your country and away from your relatives and from your father’s house and go to the land that I will show you. ²I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse anyone who dishonors you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother’s son, and all the possessions they had accumulated and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to travel to the land of Canaan. Eventually they arrived in the land of Canaan. ⁶Abram passed through the land until he came to the Oak of Moreh at the place called Shechem. The Canaanites were in the land at that time.

⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your descendants.” Abram built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸He moved on from there to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent there, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

Dear Friends and Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

Today we will be spending time with a man who, outside of Jesus Christ himself, is arguably the most important individual in Bible history. Abram (better known by his later name, Abraham) is a major figure in the Old Testament, with almost one fourth of the Book of Genesis devoted to his story.

Why he is so significant and how he was used by God to bless the entire world will soon become clear. And the spiritual model he provides believers to this very day cannot be overemphasized.

We see this in our second Scripture reading where Paul uses Abraham as a shining example of the message at the very heart and core of Christianity: we are saved eternally not by works, but our righteousness in the eyes of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ. When it came to the Word and promises of God we are told that **“Abraham believed God and it (referring to his faith) was credited to him as righteousness”** (Romans 4:3).

Our text for today takes us back to Abraham's early history. It is the account of his call from God and God's promises to him. Let's turn to it now and consider for our learning

THE WITNESS OF ABRAHAM

1. As a testimony to God's grace
2. As a testimony a believer's faithfulness
3. As a testimony to trusting God

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Get out of your country and away from your relatives and from your father's house and go to the land that I will show you. It is hard to imagine the magnitude of what Abraham is asked to do. The Lord tells him to 1) leave his country, 2) leave his people, and 3) leave his father's household. And go. Where? To an undisclosed location. Essentially God says to Abraham "I'll tell you when you get there."

But God has more to say. Much more. **² I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse anyone who dishonors you. All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you."**

God promises abundant blessings to Abraham. Seven of them, to be specific. The first six speak to the impact and influence Abraham would have as the founding father of the Jewish race and the nation that would later be known as Israel. But it is the seventh and final blessing that is by far the most far-reaching and critical for *every* nation, because it is Messianic and, therefore, cosmic in its scope: **"All of the families of the earth will be blessed in you."**

How would *all* people be blessed through Abraham? Because from his line would come the Savior of mankind, Jesus Christ. According to his human nature, Jesus came from the line of Abraham.

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, and all the possessions they had accumulated and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to travel to the land of Canaan. Eventually they arrived in the land of Canaan. Here we see why

Abraham is so often referred to as a man of great faith: He *obeyed* God's word to him.

⁶ Abram passed through the land until he came to the Oak of Moreh at the place called Shechem. The Canaanites were in the land at that time. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." Abram built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. Noteworthy is that the land Abraham ends up in is already settled and he himself is childless. Nevertheless, his faith in God's promise did not waver, as evidenced by the fact that he built an altar and offered a sacrifice to God out of thankfulness.

⁸ He moved on from there to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent there, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and proclaimed the name of the LORD. Note the second reference to Abraham building an altar. We're told he "**proclaimed the name of the Lord,**" meaning he worshiped. Martin Luther translated this phrase: "*He preached concerning the name of the Lord.*" In other words, there was no hesitation on Abraham's part to give credit where credit was due. Nor did he exhibit any fear in boldly proclaiming the name of the One True God, even in heathen territory.

So far the account of the call of Abraham. What can we learn from his life and witness and apply to our lives? We'll limit ourselves to the three lessons outlined earlier.

First, Abraham is a testimony to the grace of God. In early 20th Century the British archeologist Leonard Woolley excavated and unearthed the city of Ur, which in the verses just before our text is identified as Abraham's hometown. From there he moved on to Haran, which is mentioned in our text. Both places appear to have been bustling cities in Abraham's time, as well as very religious – meaning there were lots of idols and local deities. Prominent to both cities were temples to Sin, the moon god.

We mention this because it was from that kind of background of spiritual darkness and uncertainty and fear that God in his grace called Abraham. Abraham didn't come to the conclusion on his own that there was but one true God who loves and saves people eternally. He didn't initiate the whole process of faith for which we now know him. The fact is, Abraham was nothing more than an ancient,

nameless pedestrian through life – until God called him. Then everything changed. And the only explanation behind that call is the grace of God.

There are striking similarities here between Abraham and us here. Because that same grace of God which was evident in Abraham's life is also evident in our lives. God in his amazing grace has also called us to the knowledge of who he is and what he has done for us – and most importantly, what he has done for us in Jesus Christ. As God plucked Abraham from the darkness of despair and unbelief and brought him into the light of truth, he's done the same for us. In one of our hymns we correctly sing:

*“Lord 'tis not that I did choose thee; that, I know, could never be,
for this heart would still refuse thee, had thy grace not chosen me...”*

To fully understand this, consider this question. How is it you are here today? Our first inclination is to say that, well, I got up, got dressed, and made the decision to come; so here I am. And to a certain extent that is true.

But in the bigger picture all of us have been *drawn* here by the grace of God. *God* is the One who initiated the whole blessed spiritual relationship we enjoy with him. Through the waters of baptism he called us to be his own; through Word and sacrament he continues to sustain us to this very day. So, whether we are here as members of Holton Lutheran Church for the umpteenth thousandth time or are visitors for the first time – our presence here today is first and foremost an act of God's grace.

Like Abraham, our lives are a testimony to grace. And the fact that God *chose* us to be his own is a surefire antidote to those times in life when we feel down or rejected or insignificant. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

The second witness of Abraham has to do with both the faith and corresponding faithfulness of a believer.

Building and, perhaps, expanding on the previous thoughts, the Apostle Paul writes in the book of Ephesians **“it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast”** (Ephesians 2:8). What this means is that God in his grace has

given us *faith* to believe in him. Again, we did not choose him, he chose us. *Faith itself* is a gift from God.

The greatest blessing of faith, of course, is the eternal salvation that is ours through Jesus Christ. Abraham **“believed God and it (faith in God’s promise of salvation through a Savior) was credited to him as righteousness.”** He looked forward to the Savior from sin who was to come; we look back on the One who has already come and will come again. The result: Our sins are forgiven. By grace we are saved through faith.

Once we are brought to faith, however, there is a blessed responsibility on our part to use and build and act upon what God has given us.

That is what Abraham did in such an exemplary manner. Faith led to faithfulness. Faithfulness led to obedience. And obedience led to blessings (which really takes us back to grace, doesn’t it?). Think of the mathematics of Abraham’s situation. One act of obedience to God yielded a seven-fold blessing.

And the greatest blessing he gives us while we reside on this earth is **“the peace of God that passes all understanding”** and the satisfaction of knowing we are living to the glory and honor of a God who loves us deeply.

A third and final witness of Abraham is his testimony of trust in God’s leading.

All of us have had, are having, or will have uncertain times in our lives. We go through stretches when we wonder where our lives are going. Abraham certainly must have experienced that as well. Who knows what was going on in his mind during those quiet moments of traveling to an unknown destination.

Along the same lines, for many of us our lives and the circumstances in our lives may be far different than what we thought they would be (or planned them to be). Things don’t always turn out according to the script we’ve written for ourselves.

But even if we don’t know the future, or if we are traveling down roads that weren’t on our personal maps, what a comfort it is to know that the only One who does is in the lead of our lives. And when we understand that, we can follow the divine advice found in Psalm 46 to simply be still and know that God is God. Or as the hymnist puts, *“Savior I follow on, guided by Thee...”*

And as we make our journey through life we look to the cross where we see God's love for us on full display. And we know if the big things have been taken care of and our eternal destination is sure, we can be confident that God will safely guide and direct our lives until that day he calls us home.

What have learned today? We've witnessed Abraham as a testimony to God's grace, the believer's faithfulness, and God's trustworthy guidance.

There's a simple little children's song that pretty well sums up our message. If you ever went to Vacation Bible School as a child, you may have learned it. It goes like this:

Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham;

I am one of them, and so are you. So, let's all praise the Lord. Amen.