

Genesis 12:1-8  
Pentecost 16, Supplement Series C

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They say that moving is one of the most stressful things a person can do. Packing up everything you own is time consuming. The idea of living in a new place can be scary. The thought of leaving things behind frightens us. It wasn't too long ago that Calista and I were worried about many of those things. We had a hard move ahead of us. But we had the option of cars and trucks and trailers—as well as some helpful people—to make that move easier.

Abram didn't have those options. He had a much harder move ahead of him. Yet, we read in Genesis that his trip was very easy: “they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.” What made Abram's journey so easy? Possessions didn't help the journey, and people can't guarantee safe travel. No, it was God's grace to Abram that made that journey successful.

Before God called Abram to go to Canaan, he called him to faith. God has called you to faith as well. He has made you his own and given you confidence in your savior. The life of a Christian is often a hard journey. What makes our journey easier? God works in our lives, just as he worked in the life of Abram. Your journey is easier because the LORD has called you; to bless you and to work in you.

When God called him to go to Canaan, Abram was in Harran. He had a family, he had a good deal of wealth, he had a wife. Abram had it pretty good. But when God called Abram, God had even greater blessings in store for him: “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” God's call to Abram meant a long journey and sacrifice. But God's word—the promises he made—blessed Abram. God called Abram to bless him, not to make his life difficult.

God's call to Abram was big. It's true that the journey from Harran to Canaan was a long distance, but this call was big for a different reason. This call was a big deal because God was calling Abram to bless him. Yes, Abram showed faith in God's promises. But the promises of God ought to be the focus. God was making these promises not because Abram's faith was so great. God was making these promises because his plans were so great. God was planning on blessing Abram immensely: look at that list: a great nation, a great name, blessing after blessing. God was also planning on blessing the world through Abram.

The big deal here is that God says, “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” God's not talking about what Abram's going to do. God is talking about what he would do. That blessing God promised to the world is Jesus, the descendant of Abram. In Jesus, God became man to save all people. Jesus lived and kept the whole law for every person. Jesus died to pay for the sins of the whole world. Jesus rose to show the world that he has overcome sin and death. God's call to bless Abram was a promise to bless all people with a savior.

You have been blessed through Abram, as God promised: God has called you to bless you with faith in Christ. That call is a big deal, because it's something God does for you. God didn't call you to faith because he saw how faithful you would be. None of us can say we are perfectly faithful. We can see that God's blessings are a big deal: he has blessed us with a savior, and promises to take care of us in this life. But are those blessings a big deal to us? Do God's promised blessings lose their value in our hearts?

How easy is it for you to think of God's promises as only words? Abram could have thought that very thing when God called him: “Sure, God, you say you're going to bless me, but where's the proof?” We have the proof right in front of us: God loves us, Jesus died for us, we're going to heaven. But when the going gets tough, do you turn to God's promises? Do you rely on the blessings he showers on you? He's promised that all the difficulty and pain will go away, but does that provide any comfort? After all, God's promises are “just words.”

But look at what God's promises are. They're not just words. When God says something will happen, it happens. God promised to Abram that he would lead him to Canaan, and he did. God promised that Abram would become a great nation, and God kept that promise. God promises that he cares for you and he does. But our human hearts are so focused on what's right in front of us that we forget God's calling. We are called to faith so that God can bless us. The primary blessing there is our salvation. Don't lose sight of the value of that blessing. Yes, the path to heaven is hard, but we shouldn't be surprised at that. In the Gospel this morning, Jesus told us that we must give up everything to be his disciple; to listen to his call. Things won't always go our way because we are sinners living in a sinful world. Life's going to be hard sometimes.

But God makes it easier. He calls us to a faith that doesn't rely on what we see right in front of us; it relies on what God says. When it is hard for us to pay the price of discipleship, God blesses us with faith in Him to keep us going. When you are discouraged and think that God's promises are just words, God reminds you of the savior who is the

fulfillment of his promises. A savior who is more than just words, he is the incarnate Word. When you feel guilty for not recognizing God's blessings, remember that your guilt has been taken away by that savior, the greatest blessing of history. When you are worried that God is going to abandon you to earthly hardship, remember that you can cast all your anxiety on Christ, because he cares for you. He has promised that knows what you need and that he will give it to you. Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness—seek first his call to you—and all those things will be given to you as well. God has called you to faith to bless you.

God's call to Abram is an important part of our own call to faith. We can see that the blessings God promised Abram aren't just for Abram's benefit. Those promises are for us as well. In Abram we have been blessed with a savior. We have been called to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Now what? What more is there, except to wait for heaven? Well, God was not done with Abram after he promised to bless him. God also called Abram to work in him.

At first, we might think that God's call to Abram seems small: "Take a trip, Abram! Pack up and go south to Canaan. I'll show you where to go." But this isn't a quick jaunt over to Frankenmuth. Abram wasn't a tourist in Canaan. Abram didn't have a car or a moving van to help him out. He had to walk 500 miles on foot to get to Canaan. That's like walking from here to New York City, if you could walk in a straight line. Add the fact that Abram was giving up most of his family, and that he didn't know what was waiting for him when he got there, and we can see how hard this call really was.

But, Abram went "as the LORD told him." God's call worked in Abram's heart so that he could trust God and make that journey. And God didn't let him go alone. God was with him on the road. When Abram arrived, God appeared to him. Abram knew that God was going to remain with him because God promised that he would. Any uncertainty that Abram had was banished by God's grace: his word was sure, and his faithfulness was a guarantee.

God called Abram to work in him with his word. That word didn't stop working. It worked on Abram's heart so that he could thank God with sacrifices and call on God's name. When Abram called on God, he was publicly announcing God's goodness to him. It was like when we come to church: everyone can see how good our God has been to us. God's word worked in Abram's heart to publicly thank God for his call.

Our call might seem small, too. God's called us to faith, and we know that's a big deal because of what we put our faith in: a savior from sin. But how does that faith affect our lives? How does God work in those he calls? Do we just have to show up for an hour or two on Sunday morning? Will I be alright if I just say my prayers before bed at night? Is our call a big deal, or is it just like a short trip over to Frankenmuth?

When you look at what the Bible says, God's call to work in us is more like that trip to Canaan. Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple." We, like Abram, are called to give up family if they are an obstacle to faith. Like Abram, we are plagued by uncertainty about the future: what will happen to our church, or our school, or our country, or us? As the world around us grows more hostile to Christianity, what certainty can we have that God will take care of us? When we look at the way God's call works in us, we can see that we must make sacrifices. Those sacrifices make us worry.

Holding on to those worries is throwing God's call back in his face. He has called us to work in us, but we are so slow to trust that he is working for our good. We have every reason to. He has never broken a promise: look at the life of Abram! God kept the many promises he made and blessed Abram beyond measure. But still we doubt that God's promises could work in our lives. Instead, we cling to what we have, as if money or things could grant us certainty. We put our human relationships over our relationship with our savior, as if offending a family member is worse than denying our God. We worry about everything: what we will eat, what we will wear, what will happen tomorrow, as if worrying could keep us from the threats that we are so concerned about. We fail to listen to God's call to love him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

But God continues to work in us. He does not take our faith away. Instead, he gives us his word to strengthen and nourish that faith. Don't be afraid to use that word! He provides us with the sacrament to do the same. He works in us through word and sacrament so that we can love and trust him above everything. He provides us with a savior who was willing to set aside his power and glory and become a humble human being for you. Jesus remained faithful to his call to be holy because we couldn't. We have a savior who was willing to sacrifice himself for sinners who weren't willing to sacrifice anything for him.

And now, we can't help but show our thanks. God has worked in us in so many ways. He has put his name on us and adopted us into his family. He has showered us with spiritual blessings beyond measure, and promises to take care of us in this life and the next. The faith he has worked in our hearts will work in our lives to show our thanks and proclaim his praise to everyone around us. Oh, give thanks to the LORD for He is good: he has mercifully called us to bless us and to work in us.