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Jun

## To Be a Blessing

Forming a Family/Preparing a People

**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A**

For the next four weeks, we will journey with Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah in all their earnest, imperfect, and all-too-human attempts to believe God's promises and live accordingly.

### REFERENCES

Genesis 12:1-9

Psalm 33:1-12

Romans 4:13-25

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

### COLORS

Green

## Preaching Notes

**Focus Text:** [Genesis 12:1-9](#)

Is this the week you speak of your call? Maybe you've already done that. But it is more likely that you have told your history, maybe even shared something of your formation, your theology, your love of the Bible and the things of God and the church. Maybe you missed the opportunity to speak of what put your feet on the path that led you to where you stand as you preach today. Perhaps you weren't sure that anyone would understand, as you described the still, small voice that took you out of yourself enough to see a new life opening up before you, like a horizon you never noticed before but that seems familiar all the same. If you are a part of the United Methodist system

leading to active ministry, then you know your story. You know it because you were asked to tell it so many times in the preparatory process—that testing of the call by boards of ministry and supervising pastors and mentors. You were asked to recount it —for moments like this, when you stand with Abraham, with an understanding so profound you can feel it in your bones.

But here's the key: that doesn't make you different from everyone else who sits before you as you preach. It doesn't make you special, or higher, or better. Yes, God does say, "I'll make of you a great nation." And God says, "I'll make your name great." That sounds wonderful. Everyone wants a little fame, a little recognition. But look again. This isn't notoriety for the sake of notoriety. This isn't about being a celebrity or being celebrated. This is about being useful for God's purposes. Your name will be great, says the God who calls, so that you can be a blessing. Your importance in the wider world will be wrapped up in your power to bring hope to others, hospitality to strangers, healing to the broken, and grace to the outcast.

Your task, Abram, because he's still just Abram at this point; your task, no, more than that, your identity, will be to be a blessing. That is who you are, not just what you do. You are the sign and the promise of God's presence, binding hearts, building community, and forming a family out of the disparate people of the world.

The world, Abram. Did you hear that? The world. Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We rarely think of transforming the world. We have trouble transforming our congregations, let alone our communities. Who has time to think about the world? All the families of the earth might have seemed a bit much to Abram as he packed his bags and boxes for the cross-country move. We can imagine what it felt like to carry the hope, the promise, and the burden of expectation on his shoulders. We can imagine because we've been there. We've packed our boxes with sweaty brows and heavy but hopeful hearts. We imagine, because the text doesn't help us get into Abram's head. It just says, "so Abram went." We get a GPS printout of the route and a little bit of the roll call. So, Abram went.

So, we go. Not everyone in the congregation followed a mysterious call from God to a foreign land to engage in a world-transforming mission. But maybe they stood with a freshly minted diploma in hand and wondered where the road would take them. Perhaps they got a promotion and weren't exactly sure they were up to the task. Maybe they stood in the hospital holding a new life that was somehow a part of them, yet separate and other and oh-so-needy, and they couldn't figure out how their parents had done it. It is hard to imagine a life where there isn't some threshold, some invitation to take another step, to launch out into the unknown. In the end, it is easy to empathize with Abram as he made his way into a new life and new relationships.

Notice that he didn't get complete information about what he would be doing or where he would be going. It would be revealed as he went. Leave the familiar, God said, and go to a place that I will show you—not a place I am showing you, not a place known to you; an unknown place. That is like life, don't you think? No wonder the text ends with him journeying by stages. It might have said, "in fits and starts." We'll go this far and wait and see. We'll make it to that next wide space in the road and wait for the sun to rise again. We'll try this for now and see what happens. Even the most able planners among us know that every journey is a step-by-step progression. And none of it is certain.

No, it isn't certain. But it is faithful—full of faith. That's the way forward. That's the way to be a blessing to every family on earth: by living faith every day, with every step forward into an unknown future, making connections with unknown people who will respond in unknown ways.

At this point in the story of the people of God, we are Plan C or maybe Plan D. It depends on how we count. Suppose creation is Plan A, or A and B, if you see two different stories of how things got started. Then there was the flood, and then the language issue at the tower of Babel. Now it seems as if God has shifted gears. Rather than a worldwide blessing or bane, we have a single family through which a community is to be created—a couple through whom a family is formed. The reconciliation plan was refreshed or renewed in the person of Jesus the Christ. And now we stand as the family through whom this blessing is offered to the world. We indeed are blessed; we indeed are made great, but not so that greatness resides in us. We are blessed to be a blessing. It is our calling and our joy.

**Rev. Dr. Derek Weber**, Director of Preaching Ministries, served churches in Indiana, Arkansas, and the British Methodist Church. His PhD in preaching and media is from the University of Edinburgh. He has taught preaching in seminary and conference settings for more than twenty years.

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