

Sept. 14, 2014

Promises Made: Call of Abraham - Genesis 12:1-9

“Blessed to Be a Blessings”

What we get in these early stories in the Old Testament is God’s chosen people discovering bit by bit who God is and what God wants from us and for us. Certainly our understanding of God is has evolved. It evolves in the stores of the Old Testament. For us Christians, who God is is most clearly revealed in the person and work of Jesus. Still, these are great stories full of very human, very imperfect people. Sort of like us. And there’s a lot to be learned from how God deals with these imperfect, stubborn, complaining, faithful and faithless people.

In today’s reading there’s not a great deal to be learned about Abraham, but there is an awful lot to be learned about God. To sum up the first eleven chapters of Genesis, God creates, and it is very good. But with the fall of Adam and Eve, sin and evil enter the world. Or, if sin and evil seem like outmoded concepts to you, use the word brokenness, for after the fall, everything is broken. (If you don’t believe me, you can ask Bob Dylan. That’s one of his song titles.) There is murder, greed, jealousy, war, adultery—visible signs of the brokenness of our world—and of ourselves—and of our relationship with God. The stories in Genesis 1-11 are really pretty gruesome.

God tries to deal with this brokenness, but everything God tries, fails. God threatens and then punishes. God threatens and then backs off. God pleads. God reasons. God bargains. God changes God’s mind. None of it does any good.

So, with Genesis chapter 12, God tries something new. God decides to forget about trying to work with all of humanity at once and decides instead to focus on one person. Maybe, if God can get it right with one person, it will spread. So God calls Abraham. There are several places in the Old Testament where God is depicted as being a bit desperate, and this is one of them.

There are three things I hope you remember from today’s message. That was number one. That our God is a God who is desperate, who will go to any length, who will do almost any thing to win us back—even, we Christians know, if that means dying for us. In Luke chapter 15 Jesus tells three stories about that, three stories which might be a little familiar to you. In one of them, a shepherd leaves ninety-nine sheep behind to go and search for one who is lost. In another, a woman tears her house apart searching for one lost, precious coin. And in the other, a father waits and watches day after day, year after year for the son who wanted nothing to do with him, left home, and squandered his inheritance. Is it possible that the God who is love, that the God who loves us, is it possible that this God is *in* love with us?

So, one: God is desperate to win us back so that even in this broken world we might live as the healthy, joyful, loving people God intends for us to be.

Two: God is a God of promises. When it’s time to start over and God calls Abraham, God does not appear to Abraham with a list of demands. God comes with a list of promises: I will give you

a land; I will make of you a great nation; by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Promise, promise, promise. It's not that Abraham is asked to do nothing. He is asked to pack up his entire extended household and move it. What with extended family and servants and animals and possessions, we're talking a small town here. He is to move hundreds and hundred of miles to a place he has never seen and may never have heard of. But even this is part of the promise, for the land God will show him is the land God will give to him.

One: God is desperate to win us back. Two: God is a God of promise. And three: we are blessed to be a blessing. That is so key, so central to leading a healthy, joyful, and loving life that I want to repeat it. We are blessed to be a blessing. "Go to the land I will show you. I will make of you a great nation." There are the promises, the gifts, the blessings. Now here comes the really exciting part. Here comes the mission. "By you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. You are blessed to be a blessing for others."

If we ever forget that at Living Water, we might as well close up shop. If we remember that, if we live that, we'll have a mission, and we'll do a mission.

In some circles today, the Old Testament is pretty much ignored. And I can understand why. But I gotta tell ya, these stories speak to me. God is desperate to win us back. God is full of promises and blessings. We are blessed to be a blessing. I hope that speaks to you, too.