

***Blessed to Be a Blessing***  
***Genesis 12:1-9***  
***June 7, 2020***

A little boy was terrified of the night. He believed that there was something strange & horrible lurking outdoors that would grab him and harm him. So he never wanted to go outside alone after nightfall.

One night his mother asked him to go out on the back porch and bring her the broom. The lad replied, "Oh, Mama, I don't want to go out there because the sun has gone to bed." The mother smiled at her son and said reassuringly, "Now don't worry. You don't have to be afraid. Jesus is out there and He'll protect you." The boy looked at his mother for more assurance, and asked, "Are you sure He's out there?" The mother answered, "Yes, son, I am. He's everywhere and Jesus is always ready to help us when we need Him."

The boy hesitated for a moment and then he slowly approached the back door, opened it a crack, and peeked out into the night. Then he hollered, "Hey, Jesus! If you're out there, please hand me the broom!"

Venturing into the unknown is frightening. We long for some tangible assurance that it is safe and that all will be well. Abram and Sarah are called to leave all that is familiar to them and journey to an unknown country. In order to answer the call of God, Abram has to leave three major things: his land, his birthplace, and his father's home. These represent the network of family, relationships, and community connections which are so crucial to their survival and vitality. Travel in that day is difficult and dangerous. There are no maps, no roadside rest stops, no embassies at which to obtain assistance if they are stranded. There are many aspects which must make Abraham, and don't forget Sarah, say, "This is downright crazy/absurd!"

God seems to have some marketing skills, because some incentives are offered along with this call. Abraham is not promised that life will be better in the new land; there is no hint of material prosperity. He is told that his name will become great, he will be made into a great people, and he will be a blessing. How he will live into all this is not quite clear, but it seems that the leaving is a key element in living into the newness God is offering. Abraham and Sarah leave behind all the things that make it difficult to do something new. Otherwise it would be too easy to say, "But this is the way we've always done it!" God seems to know that a new perspective and fresh ways of being will emerge only if Abraham and Sarah are exposed to a new environment in which old patterns no longer work.

In this season of COVID-19, people of faith have had to leave behind comfortable, familiar rituals of gathering in person, greeting with a handshake or hug, being present for life passages. Students and teachers have had to leave behind classrooms equipped for learning and adapt to home settings for distance learning. Graduates have spent the past few years applying to colleges or graduate schools or preparing for a career, but now are confronted with an uncertain landscape where prospects have significantly changed. Like Abraham and Sarah, we are headed into a future filled with many unknowns.

Perhaps in this new environment, there is opportunity for new perspectives and fresh ways of being to emerge. We can't do it the way we've always done it, so we adapt and develop new ways of living. As we're adjusting, we must look out not only for ourselves, but

also for those who have been left behind. As society is reordered, we must provide for the welfare of all God's people, not just some who have access to more privilege than many. COVID-19 has exposed the deep-rooted systemic injustice in our society. The unjust death of George Floyd and others is confronting our nation with our deep-seated racism. We must not go back to the days of a fast growing economic divide. In this new landscape we can choose together to flatten the curve of economic injustice so that all people have the opportunity for a decent living wage, housing, food, and health care. We must finally loosen the chains of slavery which have held black people captive for over 400 years in our nation. This uncertain future ahead of us is ours to create. It holds the potential to ushering in the justice Jesus sought to achieve in his day, if we tend this moment with repentance, with great humility, and with moral imagination.

Our scripture gives us some touchstones for forging a path into this uncertain future. First, God is the guiding compass for Abraham and Sarah. God shows them where God calls them to go. As we move into this new landscape, we, too, must be guided by a solid moral compass which does not permit us to go backwards into the past. We need a moral compass which leads us forward with a vision of protecting the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness given to all by our Creator.

This season offers us the opportunity to contemplate the values by which we aspire to live. The four points on a moral compass could be purpose, impact, dignity, and love. What is God's purpose for us in this moment? How can we have an impact on our small corner of the world? How can we help ourselves and others experience the dignity of their sacred worth? How can I express my love of God, neighbor and self? The articulation of our moral compass, the values that guide our lives, keeps us anchored when tension threatens to knock us off course.

A second touchstone is to remember that we are blessed to be a blessing. To Abraham, God says, "I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." Biblical scholar Walter Bruggemann says that a blessing is the "force for life" implanted in creation by God.<sup>i</sup> Neil Douglas Klotz suggests that a blessing is a "ripeness" that connects us directly to the Sacred Unity.<sup>ii</sup> Blessing, "force for life," "ripeness." God plants the force for life within us, and we in turn, are to interact with others in such a way that the "force for life" is quickened within them. God makes us ready for life that we might cultivate ripeness or maturity in others.

We are blessed to be a blessing. God gives us life that we might flourish and that we might equip others to flourish. We experience far too much cursing today. Among the greatest challenges of our time is to overpower the curses that diminish the spark of life in others, to counter the curses that extinguish the hope of a future for God's beloved, to heal the wounds from which curses spring so that those who stoop to cursing also might claim the flourishing life God intends for them.

We are blessed with God's empowering presence that in our manner of life we might be a blessing to others. We are blessed that we might offer hospitality of heart even to those who differ from us.

Henri Nouwen says, "To give someone a blessing is the most significant affirmation we can offer. It is more than a word of praise or appreciation; it is more than pointing out

someone's talents or good deeds; it is more than putting someone in the light. To give a blessing is to affirm, to say 'yes' to a person's Belovedness."<sup>iii</sup>

Remember that child standing on the threshold, reluctant to go outside into the dark night? His mother assured him that Jesus would be with him, just as the biblical angels assure many who are called by God. We know that Jesus didn't hand the boy the broom, but God gifts us with other touchstones to guide us into our uncertain future. Our faith in God is a moral compass guiding us toward purpose, impact, dignity, and love. The blessing given to Abraham is carried through the millennia: You are blessed to be a blessing. May we seize that "force of life" within us and cultivate the "force of life" in others that all curses will be extinguished so that life will flourish. Go forth into each new day claiming your blessedness and the blessedness of one another.

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<sup>i</sup> Walter Bruggemann, "Ministry Among: The Power of Blessing," *Journal For Preachers*, Easter 1999, p. 21.

<sup>ii</sup> Neil Douglas-Klotz, *Blessings of the Cosmos: Wisdom of the Heart from the Aramaic Words of Jesus* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2006), p. 21.

<sup>iii</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, cited by Rebecca Laird and Michael Christensen in *The Heart of Henri Nouwen: His Words of Blessing* (Crossroad, 2017).

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May 31, 2020 Prayer

The Biblical words for “Spirit” also mean breath. The Holy Spirit is as close as your breath. Plant feet on ground; sit up straight. Breathe deep and imagine the Holy Spirit filling your body; exhale breathe out impurities that hinder presence of God. Breathe in; breathe out.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. We are grateful for your abiding presence w us, stirring us to faith & good works, calling us out of complacency to hopeful action. We give thanks for your church, which encourages us to grow in relationship with you & one another.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Like creative winds of long ago, stir up in us imagination to live our faith boldly in this day and time. Inspire us as Body of Christ to remain connected and expand our outreach with innovation.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Like gentle breeze, soothe wounded souls and grieving hearts. Losses continue to mount and differences divide. Where there is brokenness, speak your peace. Where harm has been done, lead us toward reconciliation when it is healthy. Where there is indifference, plant your love.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. With fresh energy, renew bodies, minds, and spirits of those who are weary. Revive those who work in hospitals, clinics, health care centers, grocery stores, restaurants. Refresh those who work in the field as farmworkers, utility workers, truck drivers providing services we need.

Come, Holy Spirit, come alongside those who have lost employment and food security. Walk w them into this uncertain future, guiding them to new opportunities.

Come, Holy Spirit, come as a soft whisper of encouragement to those who cope w health conditions. In silence now, we name before you those whom we know & love: Share their pain, receive their frustration, offer your healing presence & hope.

Come, Holy Spirit, come with guiding wisdom for local, county, state, national, international leaders. We give thanks for the reservoir of knowledge from scientists and health professionals. Open the minds and hearts of all leaders to guide your people to health and safety.

From homes, we join our voices, as Js taught his disciples, praying....