

February 20, 2005
Lent 2

"Blessed to Be a Blessing"

GENESIS 12:1-8

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² "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. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." ⁴ So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. ⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring {⁷ Or seed} I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

I am holding in my hand a small Styrofoam cup. If I take this plastic pitcher in my other hand and pour water into the cup and keep pouring, you know what will happen. The cup will begin to overflow and keep overflowing until the pitcher of water is emptied.

The 23rd Psalm tells that Jesus is our Shepherd who fills our cup of blessings so full that it is always overflowing! That is what we see in the life of Abraham. Here was a man whose life was so filled with blessings, that these blessings began to spill over and find their way into the lives of other people who were around them.

Look at your cup of blessings this morning. Is it half empty? Is it half full? No the cup is overflowing. The Lord keeps pouring in the blessings so abundantly that they even spill over into the lives of other people. As Jesus told the woman at the well, "Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." You are blessed. You are also **Blessed to Be a Blessing**. You know the Lord will use you to share these blessings with others just as Abraham did so generously.

1) Blessed by the Lord

Abraham, or Abram, as he was first called before his name changed, was a man richly blessed by the Lord because the Word of God changed his life. "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'" We don't know if this was through an angel, or directly with a voice, or even through another person who was a believer in those days. When God speaks to you today, in his Word, the pages of the Holy Bible, he opens your life and pours in blessings. You cannot find a container large enough to hold these blessings.

The Word of the Lord told Abraham to leave his homeland and his people. The Hebrew

for leaving is an expression that literally says, "Leave with yourself." Today we might say, "Get yourself going." God wanted Abraham out of the land of his people where generations of his family members had been involved in worshiping false gods. Joshua told the people of Israel, "Long ago your fathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshipped false gods."

To help us understand what the Lord was doing to Abraham I would like the children here today to hold out their hands as if to receive a piece of candy. Do you hold your hand out with the palm facing down? No you hold it up to receive the piece of candy. Faith is a hand that receives the blessings of God. The Lord was calling Abraham, telling him to leave his family, and opening up his hand and heart to receive blessing after blessing.

The blessings that Abraham received from the Lord were clustered together like grapes in the form of a promise. Look at what was in that cluster of promises. He promised Abraham that he would make him the father of a great nation. The Lord did raise up a great nation of people who traced their genealogy back to Abraham. In addition to these physical descendants the Lord promised people who were spiritual children of Abraham who share his faith in the Messiah. You and I are also Abraham's descendants because we believe what Abraham once believed about being saved not by our works or good deeds but the promises about Jesus the Messiah.

Abraham was told that his name would be great. People who blessed his name would be blessed and people who belittled or cursed his name would be cursed. In Romans 4 Paul talked about the name of Abraham in glowing terms and thus gives us a blessing. Listen to what he said, "If in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about- but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness." Where ever the name of Abraham pops up it blesses the people who believe what he believed about being saved by nothing inside of them, but solely in what God had promised.

In this amazing cluster of promises, one gem stands out among all others. Abram was told, "all nations would be blessed through him." Martin Luther calls this "A promise which should be written in golden letters and should be extolled in the languages of all people, for it offers eternal treasures." The Lord promised a person from Abram's descendants who would bring a blessing so wide, and long, and high and deep, that everyone in the world would have the privilege of participating in this blessing. This is a reference to the amazing salvation we have in Christ and his precious blood that cleanses us from all sin. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, "Salvation is of the Jews." Jesus also said to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad." Abraham did not see the cross of Jesus, the open tomb, and the nail marks in the hands of Jesus as we do today. He saw Jesus the way we see heaven. We walk by faith and not by sight. Romans 4:3 tells us, "Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Today, as we sit here together in this congregation we can reflect on how the Lord has called us out of the land of darkness and brought us to see the blessings he promised to Abraham. The Lord spoke to Abraham. He still speaks to us in his Word. He calls us to leave behind our false idols, especially our trust in ourselves as our hope of being right with our God. When we read the book of Romans that speaks about the faith of Abraham, we come to the conclusion that our hope in ourselves with which we

were born is totally worthless before our God. "There is none who does good, no not one." It is in the Word that we are led to see the truth that we are saved entirely by a righteousness outside of ourselves in Jesus, the descendant of Abraham. Romans 4 says of Abraham's descendant Jesus, "He was delivered over to death for our offenses and raised again for our justification." Then Romans 5 starts out with the words, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Lately I have been reading from the Old Testament prophets for my personal devotions. It was a rainy morning, I sat at my desk, and thought, "Do I really want to read more about the idolatry and unfaithfulness of God's people?" Instead I chose to turn to Ephesians 1 that begins with these well-known words, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Don't you love that phrase, "Blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Are you lucky? Don't even go there. Your life is nothing about luck or chance. You are blessed! Has God accepted called you to these blessings because you are better than others? Don't go there either. Like Abraham, you have been called out of darkness into the light. Through Jesus you are given clusters of blessings, thousands of promises that will not fail you.

It says of Abraham, "So Abram left as the Lord told him." The Word of the Lord showed him the promises. The same word of God unleashed its power and opened his heart to accept and believe in these promises. If I give this piece of candy to one of the children here this morning, they will need to open their hand to receive it. God opened Abram's heart to believe. He was living in the land of Haran with no desire in his heart for God's blessings. The Lord by his grace and mercy opens our hearts to believe and opens our hands to receive the blessings he gives. Do you see the double blessing? You are given blessings and then also given the blessing of faith to believe in these blessings and cherish them. "It is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works so that no one can boast."

2) You are blessed to bless others

You are so richly blessed as Abraham was. You are gathered around the blessings of Word and Sacrament. Your life has become a channel through which these blessings come to other people. God promised Abraham, "I will make your name great and you will be a blessing." Abraham took God at his Word and went to live in a foreign land. He did not homestead the land of Palestine as some of our forefathers did when they came to America, or settled the Great Plains. Abraham was wandering Bedouin, living off the land, seeking permission from the people living in Canaan to graze his vast herds. Abraham became well known in the area as a wealthy man, comparable to a man like Bill Gates moving into our area. He came into the land with lots of stuff. Large numbers of people traveled with him. So powerful and important was he that he even made an impression on the Pharaoh of ancient Egypt.

Abraham did something that left his mark on the land in which he lived that went far beyond his vast wealth. It says in our text, "Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him." Abraham became a blessing to

the people living in the land because they began to learn about the name of the Lord from the worship he led in this new land. We learn from the book of Genesis that he was always on the lookout for strangers, people he did not know, so he could welcome them into his home, and also introduce them to the one true God who had taken him out of idolatry and richly blessed him with promises that we meant for all people.

When was the last time you asked yourself the question, "Why has the Lord left me here on this earth instead of taking me home to heaven to be with him? Or why has the Lord gathered us together in this congregation? I believe that you know the answer to this question. The main reason the Lord has left me here is to .. (Please answer correctly) Make us much money as I can (NO!) Live a good life to earn a higher spot in heaven (NO!) Squeeze as much fun out of life as I can before I die? (NO!) Take the blessings that have been given to me by God's grace and share them openly and freely to all people? To that we respond with a resounding...YES! What a God we have! What a blessings we have been given! What privileges are ours! Amen.