

Go... I'm with You

Trinity CRC, Edmonton, June 24, 2018AM
Back at Trinity after three months in Thailand

Genesis 12:1-9

Rev. Rich deLange

Dear Congregation,

As you know, I've been away in a foreign country. I left you abruptly, originally thinking I'd be away for just a couple of weeks. That turned into three months. And having been in Thailand has given me a greater appreciation for Abram's call from God.

Called from our Comfort Zone

When I think about how good it is to be back home, I also think of how difficult it can be in a different land. We are no longer in our comfort zone. And I think about how God—from Abram's perspective—abruptly called this man to leave behind everything that was familiar. Just drop it all and go.

Gen 12:1 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."

Now, if you flip back a few verses into chapter 11, you see that Abram's father Terah started the move from Ur of the Chaldeans (which was later Babylon). They moved as a family to a place called Haran. And from there Abram is told by God to move on to a place I will show you. It turned out to be Canaan. But it's simply a nameless place for a time, a place Abram must simply trust God to lead him to at some point.

Genesis 11 tells us about the Tower of Babel where God drove people to spread out around the world by confusing the language of that place so people could no longer understand one another. Presumably, then, Abram is going with his family to a place where it will be difficult to communicate with others.

I was in Thailand for three months and can't say more than a handful of Thai words. Their alphabet has 44 characters and each of them has four different tones that completely change the meaning. Think of how I can say "what" in English. If I didn't hear you, I say "What?" That means, "Pardon me." I can also ask a question, "You're talking about what?" Or if I say "Whaaaaat!!" with an exclamation mark, that means, "That's so exciting!" And sometimes people today say, "What!" with a deeper voice and maybe even attach a few extra words, like "What in the world!" That's used for astonishment or unbelief. Like, "you've got to be kidding; that's terrible!"

So communicating with foreigners is really hard. And it makes life lonely. Abram had his wife and family and a few extended family, like Lot. But talking to people he met in other places would have been a challenge. I love Patsy and I love

Tory and Rachel and Camille. But if they were the only people I ever talked with in Thailand, I think I would have started to feel even more isolated than I already did. If someone in Thailand couldn't speak English, I was hard-pressed to talk with them beyond saying Sawateekap (hello) and Kapkunkap (thank you). Oh, and there was "sabai sabai" which means from the Lion King "a-kuna-ma-tada" or "no worries" or "everything's good". It is so amazing to genuinely connect with people because we speak the same language. It's life-giving. That's why immigrants always gravitate toward their own people-group when they get to a new country. Makes total sense!

So I've got a new appreciation for what Abram went through. But you don't have to leave your country to understand the pain or struggle of leaving. From time to time in our lives, it feels like God rips things out of our hands. He changes our lives radically. It could be through sickness. Through the death of a loved one. Through financial hardship. Through a job change. A school change. Graduation can do it. Divorce too. It could be a result of the children growing up and leaving the nest. Or maybe the result of having children enter your lives. In these and other ways the Lord calls us from our comfort zone.

God had Abram leave his home to get away from the idol gods of his family and nation. God wanted Abram to learn to depend on him alone and to trust him. He wanted Abram to forsake those idols and follow the LORD. Similarly, Christians need to remember in general that we are called out of the world. Abram was called out from his former land and life and religion into a new walk with God. The word *ecclesia* in the NT is translated as church. But it means "called out ones", people who are called out by God to be his special people in this world. People who serve his purposes in the nations of the world. He promised Abram and he promises us that in calling us from our comfort zones into life with him, he is blessing us.

I want to vouch for God in that regard. This whole situation with my family has deepened my confidence that God is real and that he will not bring us into anything that does not somehow have blessing connected to it. I get that that may sound like a big claim. But I believe it more than ever. When God pulls us from our comfort zones he is also teaching us to rely on him alone. And in Thailand, he came through for us day after day. We have certainly felt the blessings of God's constant care and provision for us through the past three months. He has used people here and many other places to bless us, in addition to giving us strength from heaven to help us deal with the pain and the struggles along the way. The words of Everywhere I Go put it like this: Ev'rywhere I go / On this road high and low / Where I go I go with You / So I won't be afraid / This is my hope come what may / Where I go I go with You.

Now, having said that, I don't pretend to understand God's ways and purposes. I completely understand that it's very hard at times to see how some things bring blessing. I'm sure that some things we will not see or understand until

the Lord returns. But he promises blessing. And I'm confident he delivers. He is always providing us with grace in our life because Jesus left the comforts of heaven to become one of us and to live our life and know our struggles. Now God's blessings come to us, first, to save us in Christ but, then, also to lead us, to strengthen or encourage us. Sometimes it's in the form of a Bible verse, a song, a note from a friend, a smile from a stranger. If we open our eyes by faith, the blessings are there or they will be coming down the road at some later point.

Called Out for God's Purposes

However, another part of the blessing comes in recognizing that we are blessed to be a blessing. In Abram's case, God said. "Pick up and go to a place I will show you. I've got a plan for you, Abram. And I need you to follow me." We have to trust that God has a good plan and that he'll work it out in our life and/or through our life. We need to understand that God has a purpose for our life. And it's basically the same purpose he had for Abram's life. Our calling is to be a blessing to the world. God promised Abram in v.2,

*Gen 12:2 "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.*

Sometimes you hear about people who are trying to leave a legacy. That means they are looking to do or make something that people will always remember them for. Like Chris Hadfield is the first Canadian to walk in space. No one else can say that. Politicians are often said to be trying to leave a legacy. We can end up wasting our time to figure out how we will be remembered because all we are doing is worrying about ourselves. That's not God's way.

The story of Abram's call in Genesis 12 stands in sharp contrast to the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Remember that the people in the valley of Shinar set out to make a name for themselves by building a tower that reached to heaven. That kind of focus on self never bodes well for us in the long run. We end up being cursed as the people in Shinar, instead of being blessed by God and being a blessing to those around us.

Here in Genesis 12, God basically says to Abram, "I will bless you. And as you follow me, you will be a blessing. And, even more," says God, "I (not you) will make your name great!" This tells us that Abram received God's blessing by grace alone. There's no indication anywhere in the Bible that Abram was better than anyone else of his generation or country so that he deserved God's blessing. Even after God brought Abram to Canaan, he didn't prove to be the best follower. He often lied and cheated in order to protect his own skin. But God, who loves the world he made, chose to save humanity from our sinful condition by using this one man to bless all nations. He's called the father of all believers but that's not

because he was such a great believer but because he, just like us, is saved by grace and trusted God's work for him, rather than his work for God.

Throughout his life, he followed the LORD. We read different times here in chapter 12 and elsewhere that Abram builds an altar and calls on the LORD. He's learning and relearning that God is faithful and trustworthy. God keeps his promises. That is God's nature! God is with us in the storms and the calm seas. He's with us when we obey and when we disregard his plans and need to repent. Just as he faithfully stood by Abram throughout his life, God stands with us.

Never forget though that God makes his promise of love and faithfulness most clear by sending his own dear Son. Jesus Christ lived among us and took our sins upon himself to pay for them on the cross. If you ever need to see a sign of God's blessing, of God's love for you, look at the gift of Jesus to the world! You and I may have many questions for God about why we've had to travel certain roads, why we've had to be called from certain places and into hard situations. We may wonder what God is up to at times, but we know without a doubt that God was faithful to Abram. He called Abram and blessed him and made him a blessing to the whole world. And that's what he's doing through us as well.

Friends, after God saves us through Christ alone, we have nothing to prove to any person. We don't need to build a tower or name for ourselves. We are free to bless others just as we've been blessed by God. We need not worry what someone else will think of us. We don't need to concern ourselves with what blessing others will cost us. We simply need to do what the Lord puts on our heart and respond to the opportunities he puts before us.

At the church we are always asking for people to give to something or help out with something. That's because there are so many ways we can bless others in Jesus' name. Keep your eyes open when you are in the seasons of change or times when God is moving you because he's at work in you. He wants to help you see how he is blessing you and how you will be blessed even more as you bless others.

For example, when my son in law Tory started a Facebook page to keep people informed about Rachel's condition and about how to pray for her, he imagined that there might be 100 people in the group. But today there are over 1800. People are blessing us with support and prayer and we, in turn, are trying to bless those who are supporting us. It's become a beautiful picture of God's grace flowing to us and through us and back out again. We are blessed to be a blessing.

We've been blessed by people who saw a need we had and met it. My encouragement to you is to keep your eyes open to what God is doing in your life as well as in our church. See where there is a need you can help fulfill. Then go

and be a blessing. Start in your family. Look around the people you work with or live by in your neighbourhood. Be generous and loving, just as the Lord is with us.

We do this because God has shown love to us so that we can love others. God called Abram so that Jesus would be born from that line. The Saviour came so that people of all nations can believe in him and be saved eternally. He came so that we can be comforted and strengthened in the here and now. He came so that we can be recipients of grace and peace each day. And he came to equip us with the Holy Spirit so that we can be a blessing to all sorts of people too.

So let us go out and be a blessing because the Lord is with us.

Amen