

The Second Sunday in Lent
Year A, RCL (Gen. 12:1-4a; John 3:1-17)
St. Anne's Episcopal Church
Winston-Salem, NC
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16 March 2014

“Blessed to be a blessing.” That is what God tells Abram, long before any of those blessings are realized. Actually, the text says: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:2) Abram was told this when he was seventy-five years old. How's that for an age-defying proclamation? Clearly, God had something in store for Abram, but more importantly, he had something in store *through* him.

God invites Abram to leave his country and kin folks (having already left his birth country of Ur to follow his father, Terah, to Haran), to travel to the land of Canaan. This was actually the destination for which his father set out, but things must have looked pretty good in Haran, so they settled there. Abram is asked to continue the journey that his father began, with the promise of being made a great nation.

While we might not mind being made into a great nation, most of us would be wary to leave our country (let alone, twice) and our extended family, to travel to an unknown land – especially with no real plan. This is a particularly difficult proposition because life was hard back then and you depended on your extended family for protection and provision. Granted, hospitality was one of the highest virtues in the ancient near east – you could depend on the welcome and food and shelter of strangers – but it was a lawless time, as well. Folks just didn't pick up and set off with only a few of their family with them. To add to the mix, Abram and Sarai had no children, so that lessened their number – even though Lot's family was with them and they had “acquired” others (as the text says) in Haran, they were pretty alone on this trek.

There is great uncertainty in life, and maybe more so in the world in which Abram lived, yet he decided to forgo the relative certainty of a comfortable place, surrounded by an extended family and community, to go to a strange land where they probably didn't even speak the same language!

But Abram was called to be blessed, so that the earth could be blessed through him! I would dare say that many of us don't think of our blessings as the conduit through which the entire earth is blessed. Often our blessings are just that – OUR blessings. Yes, we might be generous. We might give freely of our time and talent and treasure, but we often don't think that we receive blessings so that others can be blessed. We *choose* to give, we *choose* to be generous, we *choose* to bless others,

but rarely do we see our blessings as essentially blessings for everyone else, through us!

This is really radical thought, especially when it comes to acting upon it. It is no less radical than what Jesus says in John 3:16-17. It is a radical notion that the creator of this world so loves it that that deity would send the only child, not condemn the world, but to redeem it. In many ways it is the ultimate, “blessed to be a blessing” scenario. Jesus is giving up a lot – He is being asked to leave the comfort of the heavenly realms, give up his position and the access he has to his heavenly family (angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim) and – most importantly – give up the closeness of the intimate relationship with his heavenly Parent, to be present in the only way that makes sense for us. Jesus became like we are – all flesh and blood and bone – moving into a mode of being that was a foreign to him as becoming an earthworm might be to us.

In the Incarnation, God funneled all of the divinity of Jesus into the limited space of a human body. God asked Jesus to leave everything to come to us, to show us the way to salvation by showing us how God intends for us to live, seeing one another with mercy, acting justly toward all people, caring for the sick, the poor, the widowed, the orphan, the stranger – these are the blessings that we are blessed to be. Jesus used everything – his divinity, his humanity, his presence, his voice, his touch, his body – his many blessings in order to that the earth would be blessed *through* him. These are the same blessings (with a little less of the “divinity” part) with which we are blessed in order to bless others.

It might be a radical change for some, a minor adjustment for others; but what would it look like/how would it feel to see everything that we receive as, not just for us or for our family, but for the blessing of the whole earth. If we want to be like Jesus, we can't just want to speak to crowds, heal the sick, perform miracles, love God and be loved by God – we have to pass our blessings on – not just some of them, but all of them. Are we blessed to be a blessing? Let's think on how we show it and live it!