

A Blessing to Many

Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Genesis 12:1-4

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And 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. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁴So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

After God created the world, He said: "See, it is good!" It was a perfect world without sickness, war, or hate. And yet, it didn't remain that way: Adam and Eve sinned. And this sin didn't stay just with Adam and Eve – it spread out like a cancer to all who came after them. That's why the history of humanity continued with evil and followed with the first case of a brother killing his own brother, the destruction of humanity through the flood, and finally, the peoples' attempt to build a tower so tall that they could reach God. People wanted to be like God and killed each other along the way. All of this is in the first few chapters of the Bible. With this, the Bible explains how we humans are. We rebel against God and we hate one another. We bring curses instead of blessings. And yet, it shouldn't stay like this. In the midst of this dark and hopeless situation, God calls – this is the exact opposite of what people who have fallen into sin do. The direction is completely different, it's not from the people to God, but the reverse. The call comes from God and goes down to Abraham! Abraham is the first of many. In this, God shows that He calls people out of this dark world and starts them on a new path with Him. Abraham should be a blessing. Abraham's many children should be a blessing! We should be a blessing! God called Abraham away from his family and from his country! Just like Jesus called the 12 disciples. Just as He calls each Christian. The original meaning of the word "church" means exactly that: "the summoned ones!" That means that we are called out of this world. We are no longer children of darkness and hate, but children of the light. We are God's children! And as such, we are a blessing! A blessing for ourselves and for others.

The day when God called Abraham, there was nothing of this blessing to see. There was absolutely nothing to see from this God. We don't know how God called Abraham. Was it in a dream, through a word from heaven? None of that is mentioned. We only know that God spoke. And Abraham obeyed God's voice. With this call, God begins a great story. It can be summarized as: The God of Heaven and Earth has seen fit to begin His story with us humans by means of an unimportant man from a foreign land! That is God! He uses little people for His great works. Just as Jesus said: "[Faith] is like a grain of mustard seed...it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches!" How small God's call to Abraham was, we can only guess. In the film, *The Bible – Abraham*, there is a conversation between Abraham and his brother Nahor. Nahor says to Abraham: "How can it be that you follow a God that you don't know? You know nothing about this God! Yet you are ready to pack up all your belongings and to give your life into His hand! That is crazy!" Yes, it is crazy when God calls! It's still the same today. Faith in God is and remains impossible, according to human understanding. Even today, there are many arguments that speak against God. Some people say that they know all the secrets of the world because of science and so have no need for God. Still others say, that if God exists, why does He allow evil in the world. And there are many other arguments that speak against God. From all of this, we notice that faith is not a simple thing. If God's blessings for all people were visible... yes, if God Himself were visible, then there would be absolutely no reason to doubt God. And if God came down from heaven with power to put the world in order, then everyone would believe in Him. Then all people would be children of Abraham and Christians! But we know that it's not like

this. We know that God doesn't operate this way. Instead, God prefers to choose one person. This person hears God's Word and becomes a blessing to many.

But why did Abraham listen to God's call? And we can also ask, why did so many other believers over thousands of years listen to God's call over and over again? Even when they were separated from their families, thrown into prison, and had to die for the sake of their faith! God's Word to Abraham gives us a clue. In these short sentences that God says to Abraham, the word "blessing" is mentioned 5 times: (1.) I will *bless* you. (2.) You will be a *blessing*. (3.) I will *bless* those who (4.) *bless* you. (5.) In you all the families of the earth shall be *blessed*. It seems to me that Abraham understood that God's blessing is more important than any other. Much later, Jesus says: "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*" (Matt. 6:33)

Abraham realized that God only wants what is good! God only ever wanted what is good! And that's why he gives himself unconditionally over to God's hands. Even when he doesn't even know which country he will live in in the future. Similarly, Abraham doesn't know at all what will happen to his life as a whole. He started at zero. Nothing that was valid before should be valid anymore. He leaves everything behind him. There's also nothing to the left or right to give him pause. The Only thing that he had, was before him. The only thing that he had was God's call from previously. And Abraham did what God said: "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him..."

Abraham's story impresses me. I also want to be like him. I want to have such a faith that all earthly things that burden me become unimportant and I can place my entire hope only on God. But I realize that I am human. I am tied to my story, to my feelings, and can't simply detach myself from everything that I have here on earth. And yet I have the call to believe. How does that work? How can I believe like Abraham? How can I come to the realization that God has called me to this place where I am now, that my life is exactly according to His Will? In the search for faith, many people find themselves searching within themselves for it – some meditate for a long time, some try to do good works so that they can get closer to God. In the story about Abraham, it's not like that! The only differentiating factor with Abraham is that God called him. Only God's call was important to Abraham. Nothing more, nothing less! So it is with us! When you are baptized, God called you. Then the only thing that matters is this call. Then you are His child. That's because God wanted it that way. It's because God wants it this way. And only because of this. But what does this calling of God mean? I will explain this with an example: Some time ago, I was to baptize a child in South Africa. After inquiring, the parents said "the child should be called "Blessing." With this, the parents wanted to convey what they wanted for their child. "Blessing!" That's what it all comes down to. Blessing only knows one direction. Blessing comes from God and goes out to others. God did exactly that when He called Abraham. He gave him a piece of Himself! And the immediate result of God's call was that Abraham could believe. But it didn't stop there. Abraham went to his fellow people and poured out what God gave him! Abraham became a blessing. What God started with Abraham, He completed in Jesus Christ. Because in Jesus Christ, we experience all of God's love for us. So we can believe. We can only believe when God comes to us. The direction is clear. It comes from God and goes to us. From above to us here below. And through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the blessing doesn't stay with us. We can be what God always wanted us to be. A blessing to many. Amen.