

Securing Our Future
A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church
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3-8-2020 (Third Sunday of Lent)
Genesis 12:1-4

The poet Hellen Mellicost offers a prayer:

I was regretting the past
And fearing the future.
Suddenly, God was speaking:
“My name is ‘I am.’” I waited.
God continued,
“When you live in the past,
With its mistakes and regrets,
It is hard. I am not there.
My name is not ‘I was.’
When you live in the future,
With its problems and fears, it is hard.
I am not there.
My name is not ‘I will be.’
When you live in this moment,
It is not hard. I am here.
My name is ‘I am.’”

When we read today’s passage, and even when we consider the entire story of Abram and Sarai, it’s easy for us to make theirs a story about the past, and it’s even easier to make theirs a story about the future. As the song goes, “Father Abraham had many sons, and I am one of them, and so are you, so let’s all praise the Lord!!!”

But I think if we pay closer attention, this is really a story about the present, and how God’s presence in the present, can help shape our future.

Carol Newsom argues that the focus of today’s narrative is not so much about who Abram and Sarai were, but more so about who they will become. I think she’s right. I mean, really, who are these two people? They appear to be ordinary

folk. To my knowledge, there's no effort exerted by our authors to describe their pedigree, nor their training, nor even their experiences.

The previous chapter tells us that after the flood and the Tower of Babel, the world was inhabited and settled by Noah's descendants; eventually Terah moved his family, his son Abram and daughter-in-law Sarai among them, toward Canaan, but not all the way – they settled in a land called Haran. The text also tells us that Sarai, Abram's wife is barren, and that Haran's oldest son Nahor has passed away. But again, we really don't get a biographical sketch, nor do we get any details that reveal the nature and character of these people. Maybe they are righteous, maybe they aren't. Maybe they are creative, maybe they aren't. Maybe they are destined for success, maybe they aren't. Who knows?

We just jump right in. God says, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." God says, go from all the things in your past that currently define you – your name, your home, your occupation, your sense of self – and go to a new place that I'm gonna show you. In other words, God's not asking Abram and Sarai to reflect on *what has been* in order to get ready for *what's next*. God's simply saying, "Look forward."

And God says, "Abram, Sarai, if you listen to me, if you trust me, if you follow me into what's next, I'm gonna provide for you, I'm gonna make a future for you." And God continues, "Once you've listened to me, once you've followed me, the blessings that you receive, will in turn become blessings for all the families that follow."

Now, we're reading from Genesis, and there's nothing in this text about the Kingdom of God, but can you see how the concept of God's kingdom has some rootedness in this text?

Jesus proclaimed a different kind of economy, or realm, or power structure – it wasn't one that was contingent on hoarding resources, but rather, one that was contingent on sharing resources. For Jesus, God's was and is a kingdom steeped in enough-ness and funded by an economy of manna. One where your value and your security are rooted in God, not your zip code, nor your origin, nor your sir name, nor some other artificial feature constructed by the systems of this world.

Isn't God telling Abram and Sarai the same thing? Focus your present on my presence. Yes, you can spend your life chasing the security of kinship, a kind of security bound up in who your daddy is, and how you'll transfer lands generationally, and how that name of yours will wield influence, or keep you safe from harm. Go ahead if you must.

But you can also choose another route. You can choose to trust in God. You can choose to stop living in an empty present where all you do is clamor, and struggle, and maneuver for a future that may, at some point, offer limited potential. You can choose to buy into the idea that when we live in the present, loving neighbor and loving God, we begin to create a future that stops operating like a system and starts operating like something that is God's.

I think it's also worth noting that God's promise to descendants of Abram, not to mention Jesus' invitation to God's kin-dom, is not an exclusive right, or claim, or status bestowed upon Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or any peoples. It's a reminder that whoever you are, whatever you are, whenever you are, and however you are....when you choose to live with God in your present, loving God and neighbor, you create a future rooted in God for both you and for your neighbor in this generation, and in the generations to follow.

So... Abram (and Sarai) went, as the Lord had told them, and Lot went with them. Thanks be to God!!!

This morning, God offers an invitation, to a new space, a new place, a table. It doesn't promise security steeped in the world's standards. But it does promise security steeped in God's standards. For here, you are welcome to partake. And here, you are welcomed, and you are joined by your neighbors. And here, we join Christ in the present, as we wait expectantly for the future God prepares. One where God is always present, and one where we are always secure in God's presence.

Thanks be to God for such a future. May it be so, and may it begin right now. Amen.