

This week's main reading is the Call of Abraham & Sarah, Genesis 12:1-7.

You may be familiar with the saying attributed to Martin Luther that I used in Sunday's sermon: "The Gospel (Good News) of God in Jesus the Christ necessarily afflicts the comfortable, and comforts the afflicted." Hopefully we all have stories of how the story of Jesus -- his teachings, his people the church, his Way of living and being in the world -- has comforted us in the midst of sorrow, tragedy, suffering and despair.

But "Call Stories" like that of Abraham and Sarah, and us, usually involve the other half of Luther's saying, "afflicting the comfortable." So let's begin with that point as we look at this text more thoroughly...

There are three major points to make about this Call Story, that should be foundational for all Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Verse 1: Sarah and Abraham are told to GO. That's it, basically, just go. But notice specifically, God says, "Go AWAY FROM your land, your home, your native country, your household... EVERYTHING THAT IS FAMILIAR AND COMFORTABLE... go AWAY FROM everything that is meaningful and provides security in your life, and trust me. I'll show you what I want you to do." And Sarah and Abraham got up and left. We don't hear the circumstances, or the conversations or complaints that must have crossed their minds and their tongues. Next thing we know, they are up and going to a new land and place that they've never seen and don't even know about." God's Call is INCONVENIENT. It afflicts us in our comfort.

+ How have you and how do you experience God's calling in your life?

+ How do you know it is God's call and not some other distraction, fantasy or selfish pursuit?

Verses 2 and 3: God Calls Sarah and Abraham for a PURPOSE, for a REASON. It's not so Sarah and Abraham can be chummy with God, tight with God, and earn special favors or special status. And it's certainly not about going to heaven when they die. No, the purpose and reason for their being called into action is simple: So that Abraham and Sarah will be vessels of God's blessing for the world. So that they will be a blessing, and so that through them, all the families of the earth will be blessed by God. It reminds me of the book "Velvet Elvis" by Rob Bell that we read together last spring during Lent. Rob Bell says that if a Christian moves onto your street, it ought to be good news for everyone, not just the Christians who live there. If a Christian moves to your street, it ought to be good news for the Jew, the Hindu and the agnostic neighbors as well. It even should be good news for your neighbors from Ohio, says Bell! Why? Because the church, and each Christian exist to be God's Blessing Machine for the world, for everyone, for all our neighbors. This can even mean we join others in their suffering. It can even mean that we take on the suffering of others ourselves, even though we don't have to... we choose to. God's Call is always about BEING A BLESSING for others, for God's world.

+ Quote (referring to the Way of Jesus as our way in the world): "If it isn't good news for EVERYONE, then it isn't good news for ANYONE." What's your reaction to this quote?

+ How has God used you to bless, help and serve others?

+ As you consider the world in which we live, and the various places and people that need God's healing, wholeness, love and care (Shalom), where do you see your gifts and passions intersecting with the world's deepest needs? How can you be a part of God's blessing for that need or those people? (Some pointers: Start Small, Think and Dream Big. AND, Think Globally, Act Locally.)

Verse 7: When Sarah and Abraham arrive at Canaan, the promised land and new home, they see it but pass on through and move on to a neighboring land. And it's kind of like God tells them, "See that nice land over there? That's what I wanted to show you. That's your new land, but even though others live there right now, your children, your descendants will live there some day and be very happy and content." Now maybe this "land" in the story is really a metaphor for something about God's call that sometimes frustrates us. Because sometimes we may never really see a great deal of change, or we may not benefit a great deal from the Call we receive. Sometimes it is only others, who come after us, that will benefit from the work we have done. Often it may be the case that the seeds we plant, the water we sprinkle and the fertilizer we spread will bear fruit for those who come after us. Think of an elementary school teacher. It is rare that she or he sees the young adult living

productively and with purpose. But still the teacher might catch tiny glimpses along the way of how her/his work is benefitting the world. Like the old Native American saying, "We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our grandchildren." God's Call and our faithful response will bear fruit for others that will last beyond our own lives. And sometimes we may not even see the fruit ourselves, or benefit from it.

+ Do you ever experience frustration, or feel like your efforts are in vain, because you don't see real or lasting or impactful change? How do you relate to Sarah and Abraham only catching a glimpse of what will one day come to pass, long after they are gone?

+ Where have you seen - and how have you benefitted - from the fruits of others before you who may have only planted seeds, watered seedlings, and fertilized tiny plants?

How is God calling you? What gifts and passions do you have to offer? What hurt or need in the world is God asking you to address? How might you continue to allow God's Call to afflict you in your comfort, in order that you might comfort the afflicted? God's call in our lives is very often incredibly inconvenient, and will take us out of our comfort zones and our neatly planned agendas. But saying "Yes" means we are being God's hands of blessing and bearing fruit for God's farm. And that's all we really need to sustain our journey in this life... just as long as we expect the unexpected... in Jesus' name, Amen.

OTHER CALL STORIES TO CONSIDER and reflect on this week, from our Book of Faith...

+ The Call of Moses: Exodus 3:1-12

+ The Call of Ruth: Ruth 1:1-18

+ The Call of Samuel: 1 Samuel 3:1-11

+ The Call of Jesus (Matthew's version): Matthew 3:13 - 4:11

+ The Call of Levi: Mark 2:13-17

+ The Calls of Saul/Paul and Ananias: Acts 9:1-19

What do these call stories have in common? What elements are unique? Where are there elements of God's call coming through people, rather than directly from "God"? In what ways do these call stories "comfort the afflicted" and "afflict the comfortable?" Where do you see yourself in these call stories? Can you relate to any of them in some ways?

What is YOUR Call Story (or stories)?

Blessings on your journey and our Faith Trek together,

Pastors Jay & Charlie