



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMON

“You Will Be A Blessing”

Scripture Lessons: *Genesis 12:1-9; Matthew 28:16-20*

***This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr.
on October 29, 2023, at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church
in Charleston, South Carolina.***

Genesis 12:1-9

The Call of Abram

12 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. ² 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. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot and all the possessions that they had gathered and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran, and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east, and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Matthew 28:16-20

The Commissioning of the Disciples

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”^[a]

You Will Be A Blessing

Over the years, I have grown to appreciate how the Bible works / the design, the movement, the energy / the Bible's dynamics, if you will. To put it another way, there's not only a richness in God's Word in terms of what the Bible says, but there is also a veritable treasure trove in terms of how the Bible says it.

My predecessor and friend, Dr. Danny Massie, is fond of saying, "Whenever we come across the word "therefore" in the Bible, we need to ask ourselves what it is there for. In other words, what follows that word is often very important, and we'd do well to pay attention.

And when we do pay attention to the various details of the Bible, we notice so many wonderful aspects of how God has loved us over the years.

We notice, for example, those rare occasions when God uses someone's given name twice like ... "Moses, Moses," or "Samuel, Samuel," or "Martha, Martha," or "Saul, Saul" ... we learn that when God speaks someone's name twice that testifies to an intimacy that God has with that person / not just a love for them, but a deep and abiding knowledge of them.

We notice how in Matthew's Gospel, that in the early chapters, where King Herod looms especially large ... he is always referred to as "King Herod," but once Herod inquires of the chief priest and scribes about where Jesus was to be born, and once he is told about that this future ruler of Judah would be born in Bethlehem, from that moment on, Matthew simply calls him Herod! It is as if he is no longer a King at all ... at least not in comparison to the one who had been born the King of Kings.

Jesus' line and lineage was, in fact, noble ... we know that it goes back to King David, but in Matthew's Gospel -- and here again, this speaks to the Bible's literary design -- in Matthew's Gospel, the genealogy of Jesus goes back to Abraham.

And the reason for this has to do with Matthew's first century audience, which, in his case, was largely a Jewish audience. And so he is writing to people that he knows well / people who are steeped in the Old Testament and God's promises and in God's covenants, and so instead of going back to Adam, which Luke's Gospel does, Matthew decides to root Jesus' life in the person they could all call father - Father Abraham!

I bet a lot of us grew up with that classic children's song. Sing it with me if you know it: "Father Abraham, had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you, so let's all praise the Lord."

When I taught that song to the children in our weekday Kindergarten program a few weeks ago -- they

sang and danced and had a good time -- and, of course, one of the lessons I was trying to convey ... was that we – today - are also children of Abraham, which is to say that Abraham is our spiritual forefather as well.

Now, we don't usually talk about our spiritual heritage like that, but the same cannot be said of those people who were first exposed to Matthew's Gospel; indeed, while those promises may have been made to Abraham some 2000 years before / promises of children and land and blessing ... they were perceived as if promises given to them.

And this is where the gift of Reformed Theology comes into play, because just as the Jews (of the past and present) receive God's promises as if given to them, so do we! But how is that possible?

Well, to begin, we need to understand that God is a God of covenants, and when God makes a promise, He keeps it. What's now, what we see in the New Testament, is that God doesn't stop with tablets of stone. No! God writes his law upon our hearts -- and he does so with the gift of grace -- which, not so incidentally, was also operative in the life of Abraham.

When God told Abraham, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you," and when God says, "you will be a blessing," Abraham believes it!

Oh, he has some struggles, but in his heart he trusts God! We need to know that at that point in history, the Old Testament covenant of circumcision did not exist – nor did the 10 commandments ... they wouldn't be given to Moses for several hundred years ... but because Abraham believed, the Bible tells us that it was "reckoned unto him as righteousness."

And that, dear friends, is grace, and isn't it amazing to see in the Bible that grace has been a part of God's redemptive work in the world throughout the course of human history. However, in the same breath, we must also add, and never ever neglect, that God's work in the world comes to a veritable crescendo in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Last week, we sang the hymn "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" and in verse 2 it reads, "Ye chosen seed of Israel's race, Ye ransomed from the fall. Hail Him who saves you by his grace, and crown him Lord of all!"

What do we take that to mean? When the hymn refers to the church as "the seed of Israel's race?" Do we come away from those words with the sense that Israel had its day in the sun, and that those people and God's previous promises have now been superseded by the Church?

On this point, I suppose I will always tend to do what the Apostle Paul has done ... for he doesn't seem to go so far as to suggest that God no longer loves His people or that Israel has somehow been

displaced ... but neither does Paul ever separate us from our taproot / those promises given to Abraham, which, in fact, are promises given to us -- the Church!

And so, we affirm, loud and clear, that by God's grace, we, along with those whom God hath called in every age, constitute the very covenant people of God.

You will see on the back of this morning's bulletin the names of those members of First (Scots) who have died over the last calendar year; and, as members of Christ's Church, we celebrate that even ours will one day be a glad and joyous reunion with all those who now live eternally with God.

But in the meantime, what do we do with the promises that God has given ... and what do they mean for us today? To consider at least part of the answer, we turn again to this morning's New Testament lesson.

As that band of people gathered prior to Jesus' ascension, they worship Jesus as God -- he is not a prophet, he is not a lawgiver -- Jesus is the one who gave the law and spoke the word ... he was and is the Word!

And as all authority in heaven and earth had been given to him, what would Jesus choose to say -- "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."

Tell me, can we not hear the echoes of the promise given to Abraham? "In you," God had said to Abraham, "In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

And now, to all those families / all those nations -- that remains the charge ... that through us and through our witness, and by God's grace, God has determined to bless the world.

Oh, for all that Jesus had said about coming to him / learning from him / casting our cares upon him ... he now tells us to go!!!

Jesus himself may have stayed close to home -- which was God's plan for the Gospel first be presented to his own people -- but by now, the broad expanse and the inclusivity of the Gospel -- it has become clear ... from Meeting Street to Malawi...we are called to be a blessing to the nations.

Our friend Salvadore is with us today ... and his service, in Christ's name, it is a wonderful example of how all those who partner with him ... also manage to bless others.

Some folks in our church family have enjoyed being a part of a mission team to places where Salvadore has served, and maybe it was Malawi or perhaps Chiapas, Mexico.

But we don't have to be a member of a mission team to go there and to be a blessing -- ah, be it our presence, our prayers, our financial gifts to the church ... oh, we go there in a great many ways!

Going is undoubtedly key, but what we do once we get there is also key! Jesus tells us that making disciples will involve baptizing them / providing that visible expression of an invisible grace -- a sign of the faithfulness of God -- and we do so in the name of the fullness of God -- the Trinity -- in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ... that the world would understand God in that way ... is important to God.

We also teach! We recently heard from another of our world mission partners, the Lamb Institute, about the school that is part of their mission to the children in Honduras.

The children are baptized, and loved, and respected, and provided for ... and they are taught / they understand, from the moment they come under care, that it is none other than the love of God that compels those who are part of the Lamb Institute to act.

What becomes incredibly clear is that the Great Commission that was given to the disciples is no less a commission for us ... for we too are called to worship God, to yield to the power of God in Jesus ... to go / to make disciples / to baptize / to teach ... but there is one more thing ... we are also called to remember -- to we remember that we do not go alone.

Just as surely as the promise to Abraham could be counted upon, so too can God be counted upon to be an enduring and faithful presence in our life, and our life lived together.

"... Remember," God says, "I am with you always, to the end of the age," And with that, Jesus ascends into heaven -- but he gave to his disciples / as he gives to us as well -- the inward witness of His Spirit ...

God is right here ... but God isn't just here ... we also have to be a part of taking God there / wherever there is, because every single time we go, the truth of God's promise is realized -- "You will be a blessing!"

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.