

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Held from Behind

Lesson: Genesis 12:1-4a

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. ² “I will make you into a great nation,

and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” ⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him

Friends, Today is the Second Sunday in Lent. Lent is a season that invites us to walk a little more slowly. In the midst of busyness, it is a time to pause and ask ourselves, “Where am I heading right now?”

(Slide 1) Today’s Scripture comes from Genesis 12:1–4a—the moment when God calls Abram. God calls Abram: “Go from your country and your people and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” This command seems very simple. “Go.” And “Leave.” But think about it for a moment.

Abram didn’t know exactly where he was going, because God didn’t tell him the precise location. He had no map. He had no address of the destination. All he knew was that it was “the land that God would show him.” God gave him a direction, but not a detailed plan.

When we hear this passage, we might think, “Oh, Abram’s faith was amazing.” But if we connect this story to our own lives even a little, it is not that unfamiliar.

As we have lived our lives, we too have experienced many “leavings.” When we changed jobs, When we moved to a new city and had to start over, when we had to say goodbye to someone we love, when we faced uncertainty about our future.

We have had to step out from places that were once familiar. Leaving does not always mean a big and dramatic event. Perhaps it is a quiet change that takes place in the heart.

Letting go of the desire to control everything as we once did.

Stepping back from the position where we insisted that our thoughts were always right. Choosing forgiveness instead of holding onto hurt./ That, too, is leaving.

Lent is a season of such leaving. It is a time to look again at what we have been holding onto.

These days the world feels very unsettled. We hear about wars in the news, and tensions between nations continue to rise. The news about war between the United States and Iran makes our hearts heavy. And we ask: “What will happen next?” “Where is this world heading?”

But when we look carefully, the time in which Abram lived was not peaceful either. It was an age when strong nations threatened weaker ones. It was a time when power itself became law and justice.

Right in the middle of that, God called one person. “Leave.” “Go to the land that I will show you.”

God did not say that He would immediately straighten out all the chaos of the world. Instead, He called one person. And He made a promise.

“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.” This promise was not only for Abram personally.

“You will be a blessing.” God intended to let blessing flow to others through him.

Here is what is important. The more unstable the world becomes, the more God begins His work through the faith of one person.

Often we feel that we cannot do anything great. We feel powerless to change the course of world events. We do not have the power to stop a war.

When we feel small and think we can do nothing, I often remember something from my childhood.

(Slide 2) When I was a child, I loved riding things. Not just bicycles, but anything I could ride — the spring horse at the playground, or even riding on my father’s back. Anyway, when I was three or four, I rode a tricycle. Later, I moved on to a bigger bike with training wheels.

At some point — I don’t remember exactly when — my friends began removing their training wheels one by one. I was not confident that I could ride without them, so I first tried riding my friends’ bikes and wondered whether I could really follow them.

But riding without training wheels was not as easy as I thought. I sat on the bike, but I simply pushed myself forward slowly with my two feet.

Still, I must have been a rather proud child. As most of my friends began riding without training wheels, I didn't want to fall behind. So even though I was not confident, I asked my parents to remove my training wheels.

The training wheels were removed, but I was still too afraid of falling to put both feet on the pedals. Before removing them, I had loved riding my bike. But after they were taken off, I could not find any joy in riding it.

One day, my mother saw me like that and took me to the school playground. The playground was wide and had no obstacles. She held onto the back of my bike and helped me lift my feet off the ground. Then she said, "I'll hold you from behind, so you just look forward and pedal."

But I was afraid of falling, so even as I pedaled, I kept checking to see whether she was still holding the bike. After some time, I became certain that she was holding on, and little by little, confidence and courage began to grow in me. I started looking ahead and pedaling harder.

After riding for quite a while, I shouted, "Mom, you're holding on, right? I think I can ride now!" When I turned around, my mother was already far behind me, smiling and waving.

For a moment, I felt a slight sense of betrayal. But from that day on, I was able to ride my bike on my own. Looking back, the reason I could move forward was not because my mother was perfectly holding onto me the entire time, but because I believed she was holding onto me. That trust overcame my fear, and that trust moved me forward.

Friends, I sometimes think that faith is like learning to ride a bicycle.

In life, we keep looking back and asking God, "God, are You there?" "God, are You with me now?" "God, are You really holding onto me?"

When the world shakes, we want to keep checking. We want visible certainty.

But Abram did not leave after confirming everything. Even though everything was uncertain, he walked holding onto God's promise. God said to Abram, "I will make you into a great nation... you will be a blessing."

The more unstable the world becomes, the more God works through one person. And today, He says to us as well: "You will be a blessing."

Being a blessing is not something grand. We may not be able to control the world, but we can listen to someone's story to the very end. We can quietly pray for someone who is worried. We can offer a warm word to our family, and we can extend our hand first where forgiveness is needed.

Perhaps God is saying to us from behind even now: "I am holding you. You look ahead and pedal." That is how God begins His work.

(Slide 3) Abram was not a perfect man. He had fears. He made mistakes. But one thing was clear. Verse 4 says, "So Abram went, as the Lord had told him." Such a simple sentence. "He went as the Lord had told him."

Not because he understood everything. Not because everything looked safe. But because he trusted God.

Friends, we cannot know everything. I believe I mentioned this on Wednesday at Puzzle Night. We do not know where the puzzle piece we pick up will fit, or what it will connect to. We don't know how the world will unfold, or what awaits us in our personal lives.

But there is one thing we do know. God is still calling us. And He is still making promises. "I will be with you." "You will be a blessing."

Lent asks us: "What do you need to leave behind?" Is it fear? Excessive worry? Anger? Cynicism?

Often God doesn't explain everything to us. But He gives us a promise — the promise that He will always be with us, right beside us. Even if the world trembles, God's promise does not. Even if countries are at war, God's calling does not stop.

What we can do is this: Today, take one step according to His word. And in that place, be a blessing. Abram was great not because he had special ability, but because he trusted God and took one step forward.

In this Lenten journey, perhaps we can pray quietly like this: "Lord, help me know what I must leave behind. Lead me to take one step toward the land You will show me. And through me, may someone find comfort. Through me, may someone see hope."

The darker the world becomes, the clearer a small light shines. Even today, God calls us to be that light. Trusting that the Lord is holding us, may we take one step forward today. Amen.