

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-3
Message: Blessed Through You
September 10, 2017; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON
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It's hard to let go. I can hardly imagine what it must be like to pack up a few belongings and leave my house, knowing that there is a forest fire or a hurricane moving toward my home. What will become of everything else that I couldn't take along? How do I let go of all those things that carry so many memories, or those things I have invested time and money into?

It's hard to let go. It's hard to sit at the bedside of a person who is dying and to let go. I have had people tell me that it is hard to be the person who is dying, and to leave behind a spouse or family or dear friends.

It's hard to let go. It's hard to leave a house that you have lived in for 40 years and move into a much smaller apartment. It's hard to let go of furniture and wall-hangings and books that have always been around you and made things familiar. It feels like you don't care when you let go of those personal items that carry so many memories.

Different stages of our lives involve different experiences of letting go. Letting go of Mom's hand on the first day of school. Letting go of your child as they leave for university. Letting go happens at weddings and moving to a new home or community.

It's hard to let go. There needs to be a very good reason to do so. We don't typically throw things away frivolously, at least not things that have meaning.

As people of faith, one reason to let go may be an understanding that this is something that God wants us to do. Or we understand that a decision to let go is part of a bigger picture. We might not understand that picture completely, but we are convinced it is what needs to be done.

An interesting exercise is to draw your life story using a line on a page, from childhood to the present. On that line you could highlight various experiences of letting go, as various stages of life. You could add to that picture a line indicating the closeness of your walk with God, with peaks and valleys indicating a close relationship or times when you felt distant from God.

You could use that drawing of the line, with various highlights, to tell the story of your life. The story has chapters or sections where one experience was very strong or had a major influence on the direction within that chapter.

Our lives are a story. But our lives are not isolated stories. The stories of our lives

intersect with the stories of others. For example, my story has a chapter that intersects with the people of Iron Springs, Alberta, another chapter that intersects with the people of Strathroy and another with the people of Guelph. The chapter of my story that intersects with the people of Brockville is still being written.

The stories of our lives are also part of a much larger story, God's Grand Story. It's a story that begins at Creation and continues till Jesus comes again. It's a story of struggle between good and evil, between obedience and punishment, with a recurring theme of God reaching out to his people to walk the journey together in a relationship of love.

Within that Grand Story, we read about Abraham and Joseph, Moses and Israel and David, Isaiah, Micah and Ezra, and so many others. These are not random individuals with individual experiences. They lived their lives as part of God's Grand Story.

In the telling of God's Grand Story, we find a distinct shift in the story from chapter 11 in Genesis to chapter 12. The first 11 chapters of Genesis tell the story of God's relationship with creation and all the people on the earth. In chapter 12, the focus shifts to one individual, Abram.

God calls Abram to let go of family and home and go to a new place, "the land I will show you." With God's call comes a promise of blessing.

To experience the blessing requires a radical step of faith. The promise of blessing is tremendously disruptive because it demands that Abram leave so much that was familiar and comfortable. Abram does just that, as we read in verse 4, "So Abram left, as the LORD had told him."

We are not given details about the journey or how long or difficult it may have been. We are only told that they arrive in Canaan, at their destination. Upon arriving, they live as nomads. They stop, pitch their tents, stay for a while. But when the grass is gone, or some difficulty arises with the local people, or when they get restless, they pack up everything and move on to a new location.

Abram takes this radical step, he makes this radical change in his life in obedience to God and with trust in the promise of God's blessing. There are actually seven elements in the promise:

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

I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

There is a clear contrast between these words of blessing and the events at the beginning of chapter 11. In Genesis 11:4, the people together want to build a tower “that reaches to the heavens, so that *we* may make a name for *ourselves*.” The people work from a selfish pride to become great, with no acknowledgement of God.

The contrast in Genesis 12 is that it is all about God calling Abram to set himself apart, so God can make a name for him. Abram will not make himself great. He will become great and be a blessing because of what God will do in his life.

Even so, Abram is more than a passive recipient of blessing. He takes the step of faith to let go and obey God and move to a new home. He both receives the divine blessing and is also one who transmits or shares that blessing. “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

We know how the Grand Story unfolds, how God keeps his promised blessing. From the family of Abram and Sarai came the nation of Israel. From the nation of Israel came Joseph and Mary. Mary is the mother of Jesus, the Son of God, who became human to take on himself the curse of sin and disobedience when he died on the cross. Jesus rose from the dead to win the victory over death and makes that victory possible for all who believe in him.

The apostle Peter refers to this promise to Abram in Acts 3:25. He is speaking to a crowd who have gathered in response to a miraculous healing of a crippled beggar. Peter quotes God’s promise, “Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.” He continues, “When God raised up his servant [Jesus], he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

Through Jesus, the descendent of Abram, they can receive the blessing of forgiveness and grace.

This is taken another step further in Galatians 3:7-9, “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (See also Romans 4)

Those who believe are children of Abraham. As the blessing to Abraham was

continued through his children, so the blessing to Abraham is continued through all who believe in Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour, Jews and Gentiles alike. So the relationship that seemed to narrow to one person and one nation, now extends to all nations and people through Christ.

That brings the Grand Story to us, gathered here in faith, to worship the God of Abraham. Hear the words of God spoken to you, to you who believe and are children of Abraham, "I will bless you...and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

The promised blessing of God's Grand Story continues through us, both individually and as a church. It's easy to "count your blessings, name them one by one." It can be a helpful exercise to draw a time line of our lives and identify the various times of blessing. It's also important to remember that our lives are part of God's Grand Story. The blessings we enjoy are part of God's intention to bless others through us.

How are you sharing your blessings? You have the blessing of a particular gift or ability to be used to encourage and support others. You might have financial blessings, that you can give generously so the work and word of God can be shared with many people. The blessings we receive are not so that we can make a name for ourselves and show how good we are. We are blessed, so that others may be blessed through us. It might be hard to let go; we enjoy these blessings and enjoy keeping them to ourselves. But God's blessing is not for us to keep. God blesses others through us.

As we begin a new season of ministries as a church community, we also consider the blessings which God has given us as a church. These blessings are not so that we can brag about what a great church we are. We celebrate and share these blessings from God as his way to bless others through us.

How will you be involved in, or support, different ministries of our church as God blessing others through us? Will you help to ask the tough questions: Are there things in our church life that we need to let go to better experience and share God's blessing? Children of Abraham, sons and daughters of God, how will you let God's blessing flow through you?

To God be the glory!

Amen.