

What is your first memory of learning about Abraham? I remember standing in the fellowship hall at my church on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of vacation bible school when everyone stood in a circle and began singing, “Father Abraham had many sons.....” We sang the whole way through. As children we would sing this song with moving our right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg, nodding our head, turning around and falling down.” I also remember trying to read through the book of Genesis and getting confused why there was a typo – his name was Abraham not Abram. As some of us know it’s not a typo – this is the first time in the Bible where someone’s name is changed. The name change marks a significant change on the person’s life. We will get there but first God must call Abram. Like in the story of Noah, Abram doesn’t respond to God with words but with actions. God calls Abram to continue on in his journey to the land of Canaan.

Each of us have very specific memories in our lives – ones that we will never forget and that are crystal clear. Many times those memories involve life & death. I can almost experience where I was when I learned of my grandmother’s death. I can remember wandering around her house, knowing she wasn’t there but checking just to make sure in case there was a mistake. I also remember wandering around when my mom died. I was trying to be productive but there were just moments when it was all too

much. I wonder if perhaps Abram was wandering around in the wake of his father's death. Our reading begins with 12:1 but this story is connected to the very end of 11 – where Terah takes Abram, Sarai, Lot and leaves the land of Ur headed to Canaan. God speaks to Abram and he is no longer wandering.

Getting Abram moving isn't the only call God has for him. In fact God offers much more than simply getting him unstuck. God offers so much more:

I'll make you a great nation  
and bless you.  
I'll make you famous;  
you'll be a blessing.  
I'll bless those who bless you;  
those who curse you I'll curse.  
All the families of the Earth  
will be blessed through you."

I've been thinking a lot about moving – not because I'm moving but it is moving season for United Methodists. I've been reflecting on our three years together. I resonate deeply with the promise that God offers Abram in the aftermath of his father's death. I came to you just a few weeks after my mom died and indeed God has blessed me and my family through our ministry together. Now, I don't know about any cursing but I know others have received the blessing because of our time together.

Abram gets to where he was called to only to find that the promised land is in the midst of a famine and he must get up and go again. In the middle of this Abram is aware that danger may lie ahead. Abram did not know for certain how the Egyptians would treat him. We know from reading the chapter that he was right about somethings and wrong about others. This is the first of 3 such stories in the book of Genesis where husband says wife is sister to save themselves. Is it possible it happened 3 times, yes but it is more likely a retelling of the same story. What we do know is that stories like this appear in writings throughout the region in a variety of cultures.

What does this story tell us about God? That God is faithful. We remember that after the flood God promises never to flood the earth but allows the natural world to continue. Spring & summer, feast and famine. There is an ebb & flow. We also know that God is with Abram and brings a curse upon Pharaoh for taking Sarai as his wife. I struggle here. How can God punish Pharaoh for taking Sarai when she was offered. Pharaoh thought it was above board. Pharaoh compensated her “brother” well for making her his wife. How can this be what God wants? It’s safe to say it is not what God wanted for the people. But actions have consequences that do not always make sense. Like when we see people speeding on the interstate all the time and they don’t get tickets but the one

time we do, bam there's an officer with flashing red lights behind you. God chose to limit God's actions in the world after Noah. God's promise of presence & blessing is not always perfect because we live in the broken world.

What do we learn about Abram? That he is imperfect just like those who went before and those of us who come after. Abram will be Abraham. God will continue to be with, bless and even curse those who are in contact with him. What we take from this part of our story is that God is with us, even in the muck. May we work towards bringing blessings to those whom we meet. In the name of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit. Amen.