

# “The Great Eight Core Stories of the Bible”

## Sermon #1 – “God’s Call”

Preacher: Jim Short  
 Sunday February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010  
 1000am  
 Annual Meeting Sunday



Genesis 12: 1-9

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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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.\*

to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan,

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. <sup>5</sup>Abram took his wife <sup>6</sup>Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak\* of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 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 <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>And Abram journeyed on by stages towards the Negeb.

Genesis 17

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty;\* walk before me, and be blameless. <sup>2</sup>And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.’ <sup>3</sup>Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, <sup>4</sup>‘As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup>No longer shall your name be Abram,\* but your name shall be Abraham;\* for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup>I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring\* after you. <sup>8</sup>And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.’

<sup>9</sup> God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup>Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. <sup>13</sup>Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.’

15 God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup>I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.' <sup>17</sup>Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?' <sup>18</sup>And Abraham said to God, 'O that Ishmael might live in your sight!' <sup>19</sup>God said, 'No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac.\* I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. <sup>20</sup>As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. <sup>21</sup>But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year.' <sup>22</sup>And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

23 Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. <sup>24</sup>Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>25</sup>And his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. <sup>26</sup>That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; <sup>27</sup>and all the men of his house, slaves born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

+++++++

Prayer:

"Gracious God, may the meditations of my heart and the words of my lips if they be your words be worthy and acceptable unto you and may your word come to your people either through me or despite me. Amen."

+++++

Our Lent and Easter bible study program this year, which about 20 people in two groups are participating, is entitled:

"Adult Crossings: God's Journey with Us"

It focuses on eight core biblical stories whose themes are repeated in different settings and in the lives of biblical characters time and time again...

And speak to us both as individual Christians and a church in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ladner...

The material suggests that these "primal narratives" tell the basic story of God was active in times past and through the telling and hearing of these stories we are more able to recognize God's presence and call in our lives today...

So as those 20 people and I study together – you'll join us through Sunday worship and my sermons on those same themes...

- God's Call
- The Exodus – Moses and the people of Israel – let my people go
- The Sinai Covenant – up the mountain Moses goes and comes down with the 10 commandments

- The Promised Land – still a source of blessing and controversy in the world today
- Davidic Rule – The Monarch – Saul, David and Solomon
- Jesus' Life
- The Cross – on Psalm Passion Sunday and the Beginning of Holy Week
- And The Resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday

I'm going to do briefly three things:

- a) I want to frame for you the first 12 chapters of Genesis in terms of content and importance for the whole biblical narrative
- b) I want to relate the story of Abraham and Sarah
- c) I want to identify how it speaks to us about God's calling in our lives.

++++++

The first book in the Bible is Genesis – the story of the beginnings of the human life...

And push right out of your mind – that huge 20<sup>th</sup> century debate which is lessening in intensity around Darwinism and Creationism...

The 21<sup>st</sup> century post enlightenment way of looking at the Biblical material – “it had to happen exactly as it is written or it is not true” - is not the culture or worldview out of which these stories arose...

For the writer of the book of Genesis – these stories spoke a profound truth important for us to hear beyond factuality...

And the factuality has nothing to do with God's existence – for the writer of Genesis – YHWH – the one God existed – no doubt...

And the other details and questions of historicity did not deter from any of the profound truths about God and our relationship to God that this story proclaims...

The larger theme of the bible is: God's relationship to humanity

Genesis Chapter 1 through 11 – describes the setting up of that relationship and the problems that develop with it

Chapter 12 of Genesis is the beginning of God's addressing that problem and making it right...

Abram and Sarai begin a new aspect of the story that culminates in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus....

Through the witness of the church and right up to today - February 14<sup>th</sup> 2010 in Ladner and will continue to unfold and be written about past this day...

God's relationship to humanity

And the various challenges and problems in it...

And the writer of the book of Genesis had a lot in common with you and I...

That commonness thought is not we live in the same world ...

... Information was transmitted in his world from person to person by the telling of stories...in BG time – know what BG time is - Before Goggle

We live AG – after Google –

In 2010 more new information will be produced and communicated than in the last 5000 years

In 2001 the amount of new technical information was doubling every two years – by this year – that amount will double in 72 hours

For entering third year university students – half of the technical information they learned in their first year is out of date

Take a moment – and grasp the incredible unimaginable difference between the world of you and me and the world of the genesis storyteller

At some point on a piece of papyrus he wrote down the stories he and his ancestors had transmitted orally while I wrote this sermon on my computer – checking google occasionally for references – which gets 9.6 billion hits a day

Yet despite the differences in our world – in our hearts we ask the same questions...and through our relationship to God which we understand through that same Genesis – we attempt to answer the same life questions...

Who am I?

How did I get here?

What is the purpose God calls me to?

What does life mean and what makes it worthwhile?

What happens after I die?

As I sat yesterday at my computer in a very different world than the storyteller of Genesis who sat by a fire under the desert sky telling his clan these stories – our hearts ask the same questions...

Genesis 1:1 - In the beginning when God created\* the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God\* swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>Then God said...

And the world over time was created – and in the crowning act creation (two stories of this) God created human beings

For loving relationship with God and others...

And it was all very very good...when it was done God rested on the Sabbath...

But instead of that loving relationship God initiated – important – we did not start this whole project called creation nor make our selves...

The world and us – we’re a gift...of (made in God’s image – imago Dei) and from God

We choose instead disobedience...sin, turning away, brokenness, violence, and anger...

And that is the chronicle of the next chapters – 3-11 of Genesis

Adam and Eve choose not to live in the garden by the rules

Cain is angry and jealous of his brother Abel and so murders him

The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. <sup>7</sup>So the LORD said, ‘I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’ <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favour in the sight of the LORD.

And Noah and his family get a second chance and God’s heart broken says in the rainbow – never again...

But all the people who spoke on language got together and said – let’s build a tower to the heavens and then we can be like God...

Usurp God, dethrone God (idolatry) and replace God and do what we please...and God responded by breaking up the homogenous community

- Created different languages and places.

And come to Genesis 12 with a huge problem

Desiring this relationship with us human beings – punishment does not seem to work...

And so decides to embark upon a new track – to try a new thing –

And the story of the Abraham and Sarah becomes what one

Author calls a “theological hinge”

In the story of humanity’s relationship to God (and the answering of those questions)

Between sin dealt with by punishment – and sin dealt with by grace – that will lead to the gift of the person of Jesus...

It is Chapter 12 of Genesis that God plants the seeds of a new way - the way of grace – of free unconditional grace – to respond to our refusal to exist in relationship with God and live by God ways...

It’s the way of love...

There is a man named Abram and his wife Sarai – wandering nomads whose family had left Ur of the Chaldeans (probably in what we now call Iran) and settled in Haran (modern Day Turkey on the Syrian Border) and God spoke to Abram at the age of 75 and made both a request and a series of promises....

To understand all of this – we have to understand that God always spoke and speaks first... God is the initiator – we are the receivers....

Abram was not sitting in Haran waiting for God – he did not know this God – he was doing was nomads still do today – wander, stay in one place till resources are exhausted or seasons change and then move on...

God spoke:

And said (Genesis 12:1)

Leave three things – your country, your people and your father’s household

And go to a land I will show you...

And God makes to him – promises

I will make you:

A great nation

I will make great your name

I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you and all persons on the earth will be blessed by you....

Note: Internet

The center of this promise can be seen even in this text by the repeated use of the word "bless" (Heb: root *barak*; vv. 2-3). While we from a modern perspective tend to think of "blessings" from God in a more abstract or spiritual sense, in the thought world of ancient Israel blessing was much more encompassing. In that world there was no concept of what we call "luck" nor was there any idea of "nature" operating on its own with a set of "laws" governing the world. For Israel there was only God. Indeed for most people of the ancient world, all of human existence was seen in relation to deity (see [Ba'al worship in the Old Testament](#); for a chart of the differences in world view between ancient and modern people, see [World View Comparison](#)). In that context, "blessing" was a way to describe all the dimensions of human well being in relation to God as Creator and the Source of all things. In light of the precarious existence and instability of ancient people, the most obvious experiences of God’s blessing were long life, children and family, abundant rain and good crops to provide food, shelter, and peace (cf. Deut 28:1-14).

That does not mean that we have to return to the thought world of 10th century BC Israel to understand and appropriate this text. We do not need to abandon our own worldview, give up the advances in knowledge afforded by the natural sciences, and assume that God is the immediate and direct cause of every single thing that happens in the world. We only need to understand that the confession here is not about the physical world but about God. The concept behind "blessing" is simply a confession that all of human existence is under God as the Source of all things.

What do we learn?

Accept that God “speaks” to us in the same way God spoke to Abraham and Sarai...

God calls them at age 75 – at the age in our society where people are retired and often seen to be in our youth oriented production oriented culture to be of limited use and value...

Yet this is God’s choice because what matters more than what he may or may not be or be capable of is that God has chosen Abram and Sarai...

The promises seem so outrageous and unbelievable that they laugh....

Abram – how can we have children at this age?

And sometimes what we hear God calling us to seems like that...but again...it matters less what we believe and more what God can do...

They get new names – Abraham and Sarah...in nomadic society where one was defined by the name that related you to your past...and all that might hold you down...these new names orient Abraham and Sarah to the future promises of God....

It's a journey that really matters...not the end because that belongs to God....God tells Abraham and Sarah what the end will be – a blessings to all but all that they are asked to do is to take the first step in faith and obedience... – the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single first step.

In English we have only a noun for faith, which mistakenly makes us believe that faith is about knowing..., doctrinal content

In biblical times faith was a movement....it was putting one foot in front of the other...listening and trusting God with the rest...

It means leaving something behind...choosing against something and choosing for something...

And the choices that God calls Abraham and Sarah to – in some sense subvert common wisdom and are counter intuitive...

They leave their geographical place and location – their home, their customs, their comforts, their family and their friends...

All that in a tribal society gives meaning and purpose...

They are called to embrace different and new people's they will meet...

The unfamiliar, the unknown, the fearful and to put aside their  
Narrow minded and small parochial meanness...

The fear of personal powerlessness in face of impossibilities – it cannot be done

(Journey with Jesus – Abraham: The Father of us All – May 30, 2005 – Dan Clendenin)

Eugene Peterson....Christ plays in Ten Thousand Places (2005)

Eugene Peterson comments on our propensity to sectarian, narcissistic narrow mindedness. Says Peterson,

"We exclude all who don't suit our preferences. We become a sect. Sects are composed of men and women who reinforce their basic selfism by banding together with others who are pursuing similar brands of selfism, liking the same foods, believing in the same idols, playing the same games, despising the same outsiders...A sect is accomplished by community reduction, getting rid of what does not please us, getting rid of what offends us, whether of ideas or of people. We construct religious clubs instead of entering resurrection communities...[But] with the call of Abraham, the long, slow, complex, and still continuing movement to pull all these selves into a people of God community began. The birthing of Jesus' community on the Day of Pentecost was an implicit but emphatic repudiation and then reversal of Babel sectarianism"

Instead of this exclusionary parochialism, instead of defining people out of the community "according to our own tastes and predispositions" (Peterson), God called Abraham and now us to a universal and inclusive embrace of everyone and "all peoples on earth."

How do we hear God? Extraordinary events and the still small voice, Crisis and hardship (what is important and what strengths and gifts we have because we had to use them) Nudge, Intuition, Intentional listening – prayer forms, bible, devotional, meditation

In the end...how we respond....many of us are engrossed in the Olympic Games...with the focus on gold...as all that matters...

Hero culture, celebrity culture (last night I was at Shoppers buying something and looking towards the magazine rack while waiting and the cashier said – wonder why we admire them so – they have all the money in the world and they are not happy) entertainment culture

Problem with hero cultures is that they tend towards greed and selfishness...an indication is that it was so easy to spend those billions upon a two week sporting event – but we'd struggle to spend those billions upon health care, world starvation...

Can you imagine a world where corporate sponsors would pay and participate in a campaign to end child poverty or to give every child in the world an education?

Counter cultural and counter intuitive...and that poor Canadian downhill skier – she won a silver medal but its not good enough....

I was channel surfing a few nights ago (Cathy is away) and I came across an add for the new Survivor Heroes and Villains series

One female character was talking about her great affection and friendship and respect for her mate – and then looked at the camera and said – at least, until its time to cut his throat to get ahead...

Its not fastest, highest and strongest wins and all else loses for our God...

God calls us to a different relationship ...with God  
And with others...

It is to follow in the Abraham and Sarah's path – to sync our heart with the outer action and to be and share in the blessings....