

Choose Life!
Blessing: Generations of Love
Genesis 12:1-3

We have been talking about the leading causes of life; the things we might choose that will bring us not just away from death, but toward more life. Abundant life. Full life. Joy-filled life. In the stories of those who have spoken them aloud in these last few weeks, we have heard already about action, about hope, about the power of connection. Today we are talking about blessing.

Blessing is another of the leading causes of life. Somehow, we receive more life when we are blessed by someone else, but it's the oddest thing: we also receive more life when we bless others. And that's how we get to the story of Abraham that we read this morning.

You will be a blessing to others, was God's promise that was powerful enough to lure Abraham away from his comfortable middle class life. Before God found him, Abraham and his wife Sarah were really pretty much fine. They had everything they needed: a nice house, a reliable late-model car, flat screen TV, a little vacation place at the lake. No children, but they'd made their peace with that. They were fine, and occasionally, even happy. And then God showed up. "Come with me," God said to Abraham, "and I will bless you. I will bless you enough so that you will *be* a blessing. In you, *all the families of the world shall be blessed.*"

And that, Abraham could not resist. Maybe he had never thought about it before, but now that God had said it, he realized he wanted—maybe he even needed—not only for his life to be blessed, but for his life to be a blessing to others. That promise—that possibility—was enough to move Abraham from his settled, comfortable life into listening, every day, for what God was asking him to do, where God was beckoning him to go. And so Abraham became, literally, a nomad. He traveled for years, going wherever God would lead him next, not always sure. But always faithful, in hope that the promise, that his life would be a blessing, might be fulfilled. And it was, we know now; in history, Abraham is known as the father of all three of the great monotheistic religions of the world: Judaism, Christianity, Islam.

We could have read this morning another story of blessing from the Bible, the story of Jacob, who wrestled an angel all night long, trying to extract a blessing out of that angel. (Genesis 32:22-32) *That's* how important blessing is in our Judeo-Christian tradition: worth giving everything up and moving for; worth wrestling all through the long night for.

What is a blessing, that it has this power? To *be* blessed is to be seen with compassion, to be understood, to be hoped for, to be recognized in some mysterious way. To bless something yourself is to recognize the holiness that is already there, and to pronounce it good. We ask for God's blessing on our work, and on one another. "God bless you" we say when someone sneezes—which comes from the old belief that a sneeze meant that your heart was stopping for a moment.

But God is not the only one capable of pronouncing blessing; *we* also bless one another. To bless something is to share God's perspective on it. And we need those blessings from other people—from people we respect, people we care for, people who care for us. Because here's what might be the most important truth about blessing: you cannot bless yourself. Blessings can only be given and received by others.

You may know Ginger Rutland best from her work as an editor of the *Sacramento Bee*, or as a television news reporter. She has been attending this church for several months, and she has blessed me already, with her friendship. Ginger is who she is because she too has been blessed. Listen to her story.

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It seems particularly appropriate to speak of blessings on Mother's Day. This holiday is all about the blessing that happens between generations, blessings that extend beyond our own lifetimes. This is a day for remembering that we have been blessed by not only by those who cared for us, but by those who lived before us. We honor them by living so that we might be worthy of their blessings on us. And by living well, living fully, choosing life, we also bless those who come after us.

You don't have to be God, or ordained, or even a mother, to bless other people. Anyone can offer a blessing to someone else. And maybe that's what the world needs most of all: people who recognize the holiness that is already there and help it grow by naming it, knowing that when they do that they are offering more life. People who are willing to bless others—just like mothers do.