

Genesis 12:1-9

Abram

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Rev. Kelley L. Becker

\*Title Slide

I'm a huge fan of the idea of a Plan B. I like having a plan waiting in the wings in case the original plan isn't able to be executed. For example, when I have to speak in public, the plan is always that I will have a paper manuscript in front of me. Sometimes, for reasons unknown to me and to Dianne, the printer in the office and my computer stop talking to each other and I am unable to print my manuscript. Generally, this stoppage in communication between the printer and my computer happens on the day of a funeral or on Sunday morning.

My Plan B at this point, is to put my manuscript in the magical cloud and load it onto my iPad and preach from that. I am working toward the iPad being the default and the paper manuscript being Plan B, but at this point, I would still prefer to have paper. The fact that the iPad is available, and I know I can make it work, makes the moment I realize the printer has no intention of doing what I want it to do, much less traumatic.

As we work our way through the Hebrew Bible stories in the narrative lectionary this fall, we will see in the telling of these stories, that the authors understood God to be a God of second chances (or Plan Bs), faithful to the promise made to Noah. Last week, we left the story as Noah and his family saw the bow in the sky as a symbol of God's promise that God would never give up on the world. Noah and his family left the ark and began repopulating the earth. Unfortunately, the fresh start human beings were given did not result in the world God desired.

This time, human beings were not fighting and killing each other, but instead were working together. You would think that would be a good thing. The problem was that they were all working together for the wrong thing. Rather than using their fresh start to pool their resources and make the world a better place, they built a “tower with its top in the heavens,” to make a name for themselves. And, we are right back where we started...remember, in the Garden of Eden, human beings attempted to cross the boundary between human and the divine and were thrown back permanently into the human world. This time, God made it so the people could no longer understand one another and scattered them all over the world.

These scattered human beings continued to have children and hundreds of years later, along came Abram...God’s Plan B, although I kind of feel like it’s Plan D or E. Here is the beginning of his story:

**\*12** 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.”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 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 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 to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, <sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak<sup>[b]</sup> of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring<sup>[c]</sup> 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 toward the Negeb.

This passage forms the bridge between the “primal history” of human beings and the story of Israel’s earliest ancestors. In these short verses, we learn what it means to be God’s chosen people and we are reminded that God is determined to maintain a relationship with the creatures who have both delighted God and broken God’s heart. The aim of a person or people being chosen by God is that it allows the author to highlight God’s decision, to use human beings to bring blessing to all of creation, which up until this point, has mostly known trouble and curse.

The text doesn’t tell us much about Abram. In the verses that proceed today’s reading, there is a genealogy and the story of an interrupted journey, which through Abram’s call, was resumed. You might force yourself to read those verses as some of the characters show up later. But the text doesn’t tell us why God chose Abram over anyone else. \*It seems like a good choice, though, based on verse 4, “So Abram went, as the Lord had told him...”

Imagine that...how many of us are able to just do what we are told, with no explanation, without asking a lot of questions, or suggesting a better way to do things? God calls and Abram responds faithfully. In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews, wrote about the faithfulness of some of the giants of our faith, who had come before him. He understood Abram as one who considered the maker of the promise to be the keeper of the promises. Abram responded faithfully and, in turn, received the power of procreation and the skillset to become a great nation. It is this combination of promise and blessing that sets the stage for God’s relationship with God’s people from this point forward in the narrative.

I wonder if we might consider God's call to Abram as a call for him to serve as a mirror. As the world blesses Abram, so will he reflect those blessings back to the world. Conversely, as the world curses Abram, those curses will be returned. In Abram's call, and through his story to follow, the reader will be able to see the blessings and the curses that today's text forecasts. Just as the image in the mirror changes, so does Abram and so does the world in which Abram lives. The focus of this call story is not on who Abram was, but on who he and the people of God become.

Abram's trust in the promise and his willingness to move from Haran to Canaan will change his life. And I can't believe I'm saying this two weeks in a row, but it also means, that the authors of the narrative are trying to show us that God changes too. In the story, the God who calls and makes promises will change forever as well. Having made promises and remained faithful to those promises, God is committed to a future with the one who has responded faithfully. The story of Abram that begins here is about not only human faithfulness, but divine faithfulness to promises made to one family; Abram's. If we believe the storytellers, God will never be the same again.

The story of Abram and Sarai is a metaphor for our own journey with God. It is a journey that reaches out toward a promised future and provides us with glimmers of hope along the way. What if we were to act as mirrors, reflecting that hope into our own lives and into the lives of others? What if we could be the ones to offer Plan B...or C or L to the ones who need a second or third chance?

Or maybe right now, you are in a place where you need a Plan B and it feels scary and lonely. If that's you, look around, there is room full of people who will do whatever it takes to give you another chance at building the life you were created to live. You do not have to go at life alone. Even Abram took people with him when he set out for Canaan. \*In a world where everything changes, "Life is all about how we handle Plan B." My mantra for myself and for others this week has been "You can do hard things." And it's true. We can all do hard things.

Abram, while I hold him up as *God's Plan B*, also experienced having to embark on his own Plan B. Today, it isn't uncommon for individuals and families to pick up and move across the country or even to the other side of the world. But in the time in which the story of Abram was set, leaving one's family was a very big deal. Abram's willingness to go with a Plan B he really knew nothing about, was a testimony to faithfulness for the original hearers of this story and hopefully for us.

Our own ability to reflect hope into the world, even when we find ourselves in the midst of needing a Plan B, a new direction or a new way to start again, bears witness to our belief in God's promise not to give up on us and not to give up on the ones who can't bring themselves to believe in that promise for themselves. The over arching story of God in the Hebrew Bible, in the New Testament and throughout history is that God's love for us will not allow God to be anything less than relentless. God will continue to always have a Plan B. And honestly, because of the really, really crappy week I know some of you have had, I will just say, God's Plan B is enough. God has promised it will be and, if only for today, let's believe it together. Amen.