



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 auburnpres@gmail.com

“Flooding the Nations with Grace and Mercy”

Genesis 12:1-8

This has been a big week around here! Every morning early, a bunch of awesome volunteers would come to set up for the arrival of up to 42 kids for a day at “Avalanche Ranch”. Patty Markham was our VBS Director, and boy, can she run a ranch operation! Thank you, Patty! Thank you Linda Thompson and all your other volunteers! I’ve let Cecil, our Church Mouse and newsletter reporter, know about you, so everyone can thank you by name!

My part came at the end of each morning, but one morning, I had to ask Preston to do it all, instead of sharing that last segment with me. I had a funeral to do.

About 3 or 4 weeks ago, we got a call here at the church office, asking “the pastor” to come to the hospital and visit a woman who was seriously ill, and her husband, who was worried about losing her. They had a small connection once with a Presbyterian church, so they picked us out of the phone book.

I got to the room number I was given, and introduced myself. We got some chance to talk on the first day, and then talked a little more another day. They said clearly they were not “church-goers”. We had to talk around the stream of medical personnel taking blood samples and advising on medications, and the like. This couple then asked if I would do the funeral for the wife, since it was clear she would not live long. I tried to listen to God right there, sensed I was to do this, so I took the risk and agreed.

Then last week, this woman did die, and a funeral home called me Friday to verify that I would show up on Tuesday morning—“to say a few words,” was how they put it. Of course, I did not have a date and time on my calendar, I had VBS. But I felt a push that I took to be from God that I should make the effort, and that’s what made me ask Preston to take over so I could do the service. Like the kids in VBS learned this week from the stories of Rahab, Joshua, Naaman and Jesus, sometimes God wants us to trust Him, for our God is the one true God.

On Monday afternoon, I took one of our members with me to the family home, and tried to put together a service. Again they told me they were “simple people”, and “not church-goers”, and that anything I would do would be fine.

It’s hard to plan a Christian service for people who don’t know Jesus Christ.

Monday night and Tuesday morning early, I prayed a lot about what I should do and say. I sensed I should speak of God’s mercy, and ask God to extend his mercy to this woman—who was a terrific mother, by the way—her family was #1 for her. In the service, then, we spoke of this woman’s life. No one got up to add anything, after I finished that part. So I concluded with an appeal that they would find so much more in life if they would turn to God and come to know

God. They looked back at me with dull eyes. “No interest” was written over their faces. A final prayer—not from them, but from me, in the hope that they would come some day to make such a prayer themselves. And we were done, and I was out-a-there.

Rarely have I been invited into a family that was so clueless about God. Perhaps there’ll be a time for me to get with them again, and learn how that happened in their case. Part of me is truly curious; it’s just so foreign to me that God is so foreign to them!

These seemed to be good folks—hard-working, family-oriented. But is that all? As Peggy Lee used to sing, “Is that all there is?”

“What’s it all about, Alfie?”

Around the world, that’s what life is to a lot of people. That’s enough for many folks. But that changes when God shows up. This morning, we’re going to look on as God shows up to Abram, a clan leader in Mesopotamia some 3800 years ago. God has a plan, and wants to recruit Abe as his agent to change the course of history, and the destiny of all people. But it will require that Abram trust God, and take a risk.

Open your Bibles with me to the first book, to Genesis, and find chapter 12. The men on Friday mornings have been studying Genesis. I’ve hammered several times that the early “pre-history” stories of Genesis are setting the stage for this twelfth chapter of Genesis, when God does something quite radical. I’ll invite you to read aloud with me together this time, with the words on the screen, and then we’ll dig in. As we read out loud, listen for the voice of God in His Word. *[text]*

Genesis 1-11 is a prelude to the story the writers have been itching to tell here in Genesis 12—the story of God calling Abram to leave all he’s known, and by faith alone, trust God’s promise that God will make Abe the father of a nation. This covenant—the promises of the two parties, God and Abram—is the foundation on which the rest of our Bible is built. So this morning, I want to look with you more carefully at this passage, to see at least some of what God wants to say to us today.

Abe was living the life of a nomadic clan leader, as best we can tell. Moses, in Deuteronomy 26:5 calls Abe, “a wandering Aramean”. God, the Lord, speaks to Abram. This must have been very strange for him, for there is no record that the Chaldeans—the older name for the Babylonians—had ever called on the name of the Lord--lots of other gods, to be sure, but not “the Lord”.

No introductions. No “how’s the wife and kids”. This God—this Lord—calls Abe to a major life change, leaving everything he’s known, the roots of his wealth and family, and head out to some “undisclosed location”. Whoa!

I can imagine Abe saying to himself, “Who IS this?? He wants me to do WHAT??!” But we get none of that. Without a word, Abe packs up his clan, and moves day by day as God directs. At the land of the Canaanites, God speaks again: this is the land I will give you, in which I will fulfill my promise, says God. And Abram pitches his tent there, and builds an altar to mark the spot, and then moves on to the Negeb wilderness.

This single decision, to obey this call of God, changed history. It provided God a “pilot plant”, a nation of people through whom God would show the whole world His plan and provision for all humanity.

Now, what was in it for Abe? He gets to be the founder of a great nation. Not only will he be revered by all the generations that follow; many of those people will be his personal descendants—which was a heck of a good offer to a man who was old enough to be making out his will, and still with not a single child of his own. From “no legacy”--“no posterity”--to “a nation of people as many as the grains of sand on the beach”.

But there was a second part of God’s promise that was just as important: “all the families of the earth will be blessed in you.” “Blessed, to be a blessing.” (Say that with me: “Blessed, to be a blessing.”) It has always been tempting to cling to the “I will bless you” part of this promise of God, but God’s people have always gotten into trouble when they forget the second part--that they are to be a blessing to others with the blessings with which they have been blessed. Israel forgot this. They were set aside. Christians and churches often forget this. God is not above setting us aside, too.

You may have noticed that my Bible messages this month have a “water” theme, culminating in the “Living Water” that is Jesus, into which we’ll dive next week. Today’s point is in the title—we are to “flood the nations with the grace and mercy (of God)”, a line from Graham Kendrick’s song, “Shine, Jesus, Shine!”

God’s kind of blessing is never given for itself, just to bless. God’s continuing blessings are meant to be resources to use in His mission. When God calls us, we are to respond, like Abe did, even when we do not see where the whole thing is going. That was true of every one of the heroes our VBS kids met this week. “The Great Adventure” of life means stepping out into “the great unknown”.

That’s faith! That’s trust—the word that I prefer—trusting God. We say on our money, “In God We Trust”. But do we trust God with our money? All of it? Do we trust God with our time? Do we call him Lord—a title that gives Him the right to order our lives and make changes—but then do we go “missing in action”? That’s the way it is with a lot of Christians—missing in action. They think Christian faith is about going to church and smiling and being nice and paying dues to the safe little Christian club, and then going back “to real life”. God may not be in any of that.

No, people who trust God are ready to do small things obediently, that can lead up to large things we’ll be ready for, when the time comes. When God calls us, when we see God at work, that is God’s invitation to join Him.

There is a lot of grace and mercy needed in this world. Is our nation providing that grace and mercy? Are you providing that grace and mercy in your family, in your workplace? Am I? I hope so!

On the front porch of his little country store in Illinois, Abraham Lincoln and his partner Berry stood. Business was just all gone, and Berry asked, "How much longer do you think we can keep going?" Lincoln answered, "It looks like our business has about winked out." And then he continued, "You know I wouldn't mind so much if I could just do what I want to do. I

want to study law. I wouldn't mind so much if we could sell everything we've got and pay all our bills and have just enough left over to buy one book, Blackstone's Commentary on English Law, but I guess I can't."

A strange looking wagon was coming up the road. The driver drove it up close to the store porch, and the man looked up at Abraham Lincoln and said, "I am trying to move my family West and I'm out of money. I've got a good barrel on here that I could sell for fifty cents." Abraham Lincoln's eyes went along over the wagon and came to the wife looking up at him pleadingly, face thin and emaciated, and Abraham Lincoln ran his hand into his pocket and took out, according to him, "The last fifty cents I had" and said, "I reckon I could use a good barrel."

All day long the barrel sat on the porch of that store. Berry kept chiding him about it. Late in the evening, Abraham Lincoln walked out and looked down into the barrel, and saw some things in the bottom of it, papers that he hadn't noticed. His long arm went into it and he fumbled them around, and hit something solid. He pulled out a book and stood petrified; it was the Commentary on English Law by Blackstone.

Now these are Abraham Lincoln's words: "I stood there holding the book, looking up toward the heavens. There came a deep impression on me that God had something for me to do and he was showing me now that I had to get ready for it. Why this miracle otherwise?"

For God has given us our purpose for Act Two in this church: to "passionately love the Lord Jesus Christ, and radiate that love to every individual". May we draw God into our hearts to bless, and to rule. May we bless others with the blessings with which we have been blessed-- for God's glory, and for the mending of this broken world.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on July 22, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]