

SERMON
BE BORN IN US TODAY SERMON SERIES
“Bringing Blessing”
Genesis 12:1-8
Sunday, November 20, 2022

There are these two guys sitting together in a bar in the remote Alaskan wilderness. One of the guys is religious, the other is an atheist, and the two are arguing about the existence of God with that special intensity that comes after about the fourth beer. And the atheist says: “Look, it’s not like I don’t have actual reasons for not believing in God. It’s not like I haven’t ever experimented with the whole God and prayer thing. Just last month I got caught away from the camp in that terrible blizzard, and I was totally lost and I couldn’t see a thing, and it was 50 below, and so I tried it: I fell to my knees in the snow and cried out ‘Oh, God, if there is a God, I’m lost in this blizzard, and I’m goanna die if you don’t help me.’”

And now, in the bar, the religious guy looks at the atheist all puzzled. “Well then you must believe now,” he says, “After all, here you are, alive.”

The atheist just rolls his eyes. “No, man, all that was, was a couple of native Innuits who happened to come wandering by and showed me the way back to camp.”

It’s easy for all of us to get lost; but for some of us, who easily get lost it’s hard to give God the credit when we’ve been found. Remember the puzzle book *Where’s Waldo?* Where the reader is forced to look for the one among the many? In the holy history of God and humanity known as the Bible, God is more than pretty good at finding someone in a crowd. Four millennia ago, God found a tribal chief named Abram from among all the nations and people on earth. God singled this leader out of the crowd and promised to bless him. For us Christians, Abraham’s impact goes much farther than that of an historical or religious figure. We believe that God blessed Abraham to not only establish the nation, Israel; but to extend that invitation to the world through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In fact, we believe that when God first blessed Abraham, God already had in mind to bless the world through Jesus.

The prelude to John’s Gospel captures this biblical truth: “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. ² The Word was with God in the beginning. ³ Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being ⁴ through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people.*” As God calls Abraham into relationship with him one can’t miss the promise God gives to Abraham.

Dean Nadasdy, writing for Creative Communications for the Parish says of God’s call upon Abraham; “*Not only is it all very personal, it is all very universal.*” In Genesis 12:2-3, not only will Abraham become a great nation, says God; “*but I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*” There is no way; not even in the Alaskan wilderness that we can truly become lost; for God has found a way to bless us all.

Dean Nadasdy also says that God’s promise is both personal and universal for us as well. It is personal because “*we are defined by the communities we cherish, the relationships we hold dear, and the culture that shapes us.*” But as the world we live in begins to shrink around us the more global and universal we become. The more and more aware we become of what happens on the other side of the world, says Nadasdy, the more and more it feels as though it were happening within our very own homes.

Almost a century ago Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town* was prophetic in recognizing this ever-expanding universe. One of his characters, Rebecca, recalls a letter her friend Jane had received. It was addressed to “*Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover’s Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God.*” One can almost imagine Jane Crofut’s world expanding as she discovers just how small she really is.

But this ever-shrinking world can also be a blessing; says Nadasdy, especially if it leads us, as it did in the case of the letter in *Our Town*, back to the One who has created it all. The challenge, though, is not to lose

oneself along the way. The challenge is to know that as God is busy working the divine plan to save the world through Jesus Christ, God has not lost sight of you in the global crowd. Nadasdy says; “*‘God so loved the world’ is true, but just as true as ‘God so loved you.’ God has some work to do, cutting through all that is between me and God—the stuff of families, nations and cultures—but God gets the divine mail delivered to Jane and to you.*”

This is what the message of the call of Abraham is all about. It’s why we send out Christmas cards, or at least, we use to. It’s why we decorate our homes and put up Christmas trees. God is doing a new thing...a good thing...a great thing! He is out to save the many, even the all; but He is doing it one by one, family by family, nation by nation. And when God gets through, when the saving work of Jesus Christ takes hold, something altogether new has been born. The Apostle Paul may have said it best in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*”

A favorite painting of many at Christmas is Flemish Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel’s *The Census of Bethlehem*, painted in 1566. Bruegel places the story of Christmas Eve in his own contemporary setting of a taxing census in a bustling peasant village in the Low Countries of the Netherlands. It almost seems as if one was looking for Waldo for there is enough to see in the painting to fill half an hour— ice skaters, snowball fights, kids sledding across the ice, the draining of a slaughtered pig’s blood for sausage, a makeshift pub, a crumbling castle, a well-kept church and a long line of taxpayers. You have to look for her, but there in the foreground, among the bustling crowd of a Renaissance Christmas Eve, is Mary, the expectant mother of our Lord.

She rides a donkey led by Joseph. A cow beside her looks to the viewer as if to say, “Please, take note. He has arrived. The one among many, blessed to bless many!”

In a sermon for Christmas Day, Martin Luther said, “*The Gospel does not merely teach about the history of Christ. No, it enables all who believe it to receive it as their own, which is the way the Gospel operates. Of what benefit would it be to me if Christ had been born a thousand times, and it would daily be sung into my ears in a most lovely manner, if I were never to hear that he was born for me and was to be my very own?*”

Much of this season will be spent doing what we do at Christmas with the people we love the most. The season of lights and carols and greens and cookies and gifts will in many ways bring its own blessings to our lives. But the gift wasn’t meant just for me and those that I love; it was given, as the promise to Abraham had been given; bringing blessing to all.