

# ***Wilderness: Sarai and Abram***

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Genesis 12:1–4a

Wilderness and Lent are themes that could get old really quickly if we were only talking about walking in the woods and searching for God at every turn. But the stories we encounter during this season are full of drama and insight, lament and joy, hope and promise. Our Lenten companions will teach us that a sparse wilderness is just the place to encounter God anew, not with rose-colored glasses, but with wilderness-tinted glasses that teach us about exactly who we are created to be.

This morning we continue our wilderness wanderings with a passage in Genesis, the first book in our Bible. We read from Chapter 12 this morning, but before we jump into our story, let's take a brief look at what's happened leading up to this call of Sarai and Abram. In the first 11 chapters of Genesis, we have two creation accounts, the introduction of the idea of sin, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, the tower of Babel and so much more.

*“Genesis 1-11 is nothing less than a history of the failures of the people of YHWH to do things that their God had called them to do. From fruit-eating to fratricide to divine-human inappropriate intermingling to the great flood, to the family-destroying drunkenness of Noah to the ridiculous mud-brick tower, Genesis 11 ends with an uncommunicative people rushing away from the ruins of their attempts to reach up to YHWH. They have finally scattered abroad, but hardly in the ways YHWH had in mind. Plainly, something else-- something new, must be done. Rather than speak to the mass of humanity, YHWH now chooses one person through which YHWH will attempt once again to effect the divine work in the world.”<sup>1</sup>*

One commentator this week suggested that can view this chapter in Genesis 12 as the same way the Sound of music starts out.<sup>2</sup> You probably know the famous scene-- the musical begins with the panning across the Alps, their magical peaks bringing awe, before zeroing in on Julie Andrews twirling around in circles, singing about those hills being alive. We move from the macro to the micro in a matter of seconds.

Abram wasn't exactly twirling around and singing, but he was about to become the focal person in our text. We are about to move from the story of all people on earth to the story of two people and their impact on the world.

Of course, we know Abram and Sarai, who would later be called Abraham and Sarah as the patriarch and matriarch of the people of Israel. Maybe some of you remember the song “Father Abraham?” I know for a fact that if your child attends Music for Kids, they know it because mine sing it pretty much every day thanks to Mr. Phil!

Abram's great-grandpa x10 was Noah. Abram's father was named Terah. Terah has settled in a land called Haran. They were settled there in Haran, with extended family all around them and all the wealth they had acquired over the years. Terah was essentially a

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<sup>1</sup> John C. Holbert, “So Abram Went: Reflections on Genesis 12:1-4a” *Patheos, Progressive Christian*, March 11, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> The Narrative Lectionary Podcast, Lent 3B.

nomadic warlord- conquering people, bringing his group with him, gaining wealth and amassing possessions.

God said to Abram, “leave your country, leave your family and your father’s house and go to the land I will show you.” Let’s take a look at that for a second. Abram was invited by God to leave everything behind and head out, with Sarai to an unknown land with little more than what they can travel with in their nomadic group.

There is no map ahead of them. They cannot choose the feature I love so much on google maps as a “add destination” when I want to get some coffee or a meal. They do not get to ask Siri for help in plotting their overnight stays as they travel. They are leaving everything familiar and heading into the unknown.

They leave their home to a new place, believing there is something better for them and that just maybe they too can offer something to the world to make it a better place. Abram and Sarai set off with the blessing of God reverberating in their ears, “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. 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.”

As they walk along, Abram, Sarai and their nephew, Lot, they move from place to place. They pitch their tents, with all of their people and possessions, traveling and embracing this type of nomadic life as they seek the place to where God has called them. They believe that God has invited them to something important, a calling, which will in turn bless the people of the world.

“God’s call to Abram is a call to serve, to be a blessing to others, but it is also a declaration of love: God loves Abram, and God loves the world and so sends Abram on a journey that will bless the whole world.”<sup>3</sup>

As they went, their only responsibility—their mission—was to be a blessing to the world.

Around here at RBC, we strive to be beloved community and part of how we do that is to promote holistic health--mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. I know that we are all overwhelmed by the news of the newest coronavirus and the ways it is impacting our world. We also don’t quite know what to do.

But we do know how to be community and how to be a blessing to each other. As we consider the best ways to keep us all healthy and care for one another, we want to remind folks of the best practices to avoid the spread of illness- like staying home when you’re sick, covering your mouth when you sneeze and cough, washing hands regularly and consistently.

Currently, the CDC is recommending that older adults and immunocompromised people refrain from attending large gatherings, which according to a CDC advisor, is defined as gatherings that include religious services to limit the spread of illness.

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<sup>3</sup> Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Working Preacher*, “Commentary on Genesis 12:1-9.”

We want to encourage you to make the best choice for you and the community. If you are feeling ill, please stay home. If you are concerned about the possibility of becoming ill, please stay home. Join us digitally via our livestream of worship!

We want to responsibly maintain connections during this season and how we live as a blessing to each other. Our Deacon and Education Commissions are discussing safest practices for worship and our small group offerings. They will be communicating with the congregation as recommendations are made.

Christy Moyer wisely said at the deacon retreat this morning, "This is not the wilderness we were expecting to find ourselves in this Lenten season."

We don't have a map for where we are going, but we will make the decisions together for the good of our community. And as we've been saying, the wilderness can be a time when Holy Spirit shows up and it becomes clear about who we are and who God is.

During this season of Lent, and wilderness wandering, many people decide to add a practice or to give up something. It's a way to remember that it is Lent and an invitation to encounter the holy that is all around. What if during Lent, you added a question: what does it mean for me to go and be a blessing? How can I be a blessing and be healthy with my neighbors?

The biblical scholars in the room, which is everyone will remember that words of blessing greeted us as Jesus began his sermon on the mount. That is how he began his ministry—passing out blessings to people with little power in the sight of the world.

What if the heart of mission could be boiled down to: "Go from this place and be a blessing?" It takes away all the rules, casts them aside for a larger vision, which allows room for creativity, calling and Holy Spirit to run free.

It sounds dangerous to me. And exciting.

The healthy church goes together to be a blessing as we share the good news, heal the sick, call for justice and welcome all.

May we go together and be the blessing that God has created us to be.

Thanks be to God. Amen.