

Genesis 12:1-9 / Matthew 22:34-40

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"You're Going to Want to Hear This..."

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[Title Slide]

This morning's sermon derives from Genesis 12 & Matthew 22, lean in and listen to God's word for us this day...

[Scripture Slide – Genesis 12:1-9]

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. ² 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. ³ 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."^[a]

⁴ 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. ⁵ 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, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak^[b] of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring^[c] I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ 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. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

[Scripture Slide – Matthew 22:34-40]

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" ³⁷ He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

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Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:
That the words of my mouth
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Sermon

[Slide – barber pole / hospital recovery room / moving van]

In life, there are some things you really don't want to hear. For instance:

- You never want to hear your barber or hair stylist say, as they turn your around to face the mirror, "Just remember, it'll grow back."
- You never want to hear your doctor say, as they're beginning surgery, "Relax William. It's a routine surgery. Don't panic. You'll be fine."
'My name's not William.'
"I know. I'm William."
- You never want to hear your mover say, as they open the doors on the moving van, "You know, I really thought we had tied that stuff down better."

Well, this morning, I think our texts provide us with some things we're going to want to hear.

So, let's start with Genesis 12 & Abram's moving experience.

[Slide – Map of Bethel & Ai]

The LORD wants Abram to move not because there is anything wrong with his present land – rather, God want Abram to move to a place where the promise will come true – it's the great promise found in verse 2, "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."

As God's people, we are blessed to be blessings.

We are gifted to be gifts of grace in the lives of those around us.

We are a people sustained on this faith journey by the promise that "in life and in death, we belong, heart and soul to almighty God" - & - we seek to bear living witness to that in how we live our lives.

Wherever we go.

Whatever we do.

From cradle to grave...

We are not alone – we are joined in the journey by God – The One whose love will not let us go.

Along the way there are reminders of this holy presence with us – for Abram it was seen and witnessed there at Schechem between Bethel and Ai when God declared, "To your offspring I will give this land."

We are reminded of our place and calling within this lineage of inheritance every time we celebrate the sacrament of Baptism.

[Slide – Baptism Photo]

In their book *Resident Aliens*, Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon tell the story of a pastor who said to a

baby after the baptism, loud enough for parents and congregation to hear, “Little [child], by this act of baptism, we welcome you to a journey that will take your whole life. This isn’t the end. It’s the beginning of God’s experiment with your life. What God will make of you, we know not. Where God will take you, surprise you, we cannot say. This we do know, and this we say – God is with you.”

In *The French Reformed Liturgy* for baptism the following words are spoken to candidates for baptism, even when they are infants, as a powerful sign to the gathered community that God’s love precedes and transcends human understanding.

[Slide – Baptismal Font with words “At your baptism, God tells you that...”]

At your baptism, God tells you that...
For you Jesus Christ came into the world.
For you [Jesus] lived and showed God’s love.
For you [Jesus] suffered the darkness of Calvary and cried at the last, “It is finished.”
For you [Jesus] triumphed over death and rose in newness of life.
For you [Jesus] ascended to reign at God’s right hand.
All this [Jesus] did for you, before you knew anything of it.
And so the Word of Scripture is fulfilled: “We love because God loved us first.”

God is with us - & - God calls us to be active in this world in ways that declare blessing to those around us – blessings centered around and most fully characterized in the word – love.

Which brings us to this morning’s other text – Matthew 22.

[Title Slide]

“Jesus said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

With proverb-like brevity and precision, Jesus answers the question about “which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

He does so in such a way that it goes beyond the expected – it transcends and transforms the way we interact in this world – it is something we’re going to want to hear.

First, there is Jesus’ use of the simple yet profound word “like” – ‘And a second is *like* [the first].’ The stress is put – if not on the equality – then certainly the dynamic interrelationship that operates between the commands to love God and to love neighbor.

Accountability to one is meaningless without concern to the other.

We cannot love God while discounting our neighbor – regardless of how “right” we are.

Second, there is the way Jesus interprets the greatest commandment by saying, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” It’s more than summation – it is directive. Jesus’ love command gets to the very heart of who & whose we are – it provides for us the connective tissue between appreciating and observing God’s call upon our lives.

Can we honestly say “we love God” if we hold contempt and hatred and vitriol in our hearts toward the people around us?

Why is it so hard to love?

Why does hatred seem to come so easily to us?

Perhaps Rabbi David Wolpe’s 2016 TIME magazine article *5 Spiritual New Year’s Resolutions* will offer some insight,

[Slide – 5 Spiritual New Year’s Resolutions (Rabbi David Wolpe)]

“It’s easy to pretend that what we watch and how we speak have no effects on us. But the constant pounding of hatreds and dehumanization that marks so much of our media have consequences. Part of who you are is the sum of the influences you choose: what you watch, who you associate with, how you speak about others both publicly and privately.

Life is a continuous journey of soul shaping...keep your deep journey in mind.

...

You only get one soul; don’t squander it in things unworthy of its majesty.”

[Title Slide]

In his response to the lawyer’s question, Jesus redirects us toward encounters which reveal love’s fullest most vibrant dimension – and take place within covenant accountability to God and neighbor.

What could happen if we surrender to the kind of love Jesus teaches and embodies...

What could happen if we believed we are blessed to be blessings.

What could happen if we allowed ourselves to be formed, reformed and transformed by a calling which has no place for hatred – only love...

What could happen if we loved God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind.’ - & - ‘Loved our neighbor as ourselves.’

What could happen?

Perhaps, if we lived in such ways, our lives would be saying something others would want to hear.

We won’t know...unless we try.

To God be the Glory...Now, and Forevermore.

Amen.