**Genesis 12:1-7** August 4, 2016

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Pentecost 16

*Genesis 12:1 The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.*

*2 “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;*

*I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*

*3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;*

*and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

*4 So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. 5He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.*

*6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

After graduation, as Lisa and I were packing to move overseas, we got a package in the mail. Inside was a cassette tape, remember those? A friend of Lisa’s for eight years, whose husband was a Seminary classmate of mine, had sent it. Carefully marked on the tape was a place for a song titled, “Please Don’t Send Me to Africa!” I could hear our friends saying, “Here am I, send them!” The intro for that song is a preacher preaching powerfully about the great missionary, David Livingstone. He ends his fiery sermon with the resounding words, “…And he never came back… came back… came back…” Ha! L-O-L! Thanks, Ben and Sue!

What made it funny was that we very probably would come back to America. Only one WELS missionary has ever died in Africa.

“And he never came back” would not be funny in the least if you were a soldier being deployed to a combat zone. It would be disgusting. It would almost be like a curse among people who consciously choose to not say, “Good bye” but who instead say, “I’ll see you” when they leave.

And that is how missionary work *used* to be. Most missionaries of previous centuries never did come back. When they boarded the ship, often it was the last time they were seen. Good-byes were good-byes. Going to some parts of the world, missionaries packed their few earthly belongings for life overseas—they packed them in their own coffins. That’ll make you stop and think. “And he never came back” would not have been funny for them either.

One man told me about being drafted back in the Vietnam era. At the end of boot camp, all the soldiers were assembled. Names were read. Half were assigned to Germany, half to Vietnam. The Vietnam contingent were in a state of shock. “And they never came back” was the terror resounding in the minds of those draftees.

I wonder if Abram knew that. I wonder if when he bid farewell to the people he had known, when he packed the camel and disappeared down the trail, I wonder if he knew he would never come back? Because Abram and Sarai,

**THEY NEVER CAME BACK**

**I. What they lost**

When the Lord came to Abram and spoke to him, he really put something in front of him. Some people have this idea that when you do the Lord’s will, it’s always a win-win situation. Do what he wants, and everything is good. To be honest, I wonder which Bible those people are reading. When the Lord came to Abram, did you hear what he said? ***“The Lord said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’”*** That doesn’t sound like a win-win in my book.

***“Leave you country…”*** Do you know what the most beautiful place in the world is? Ask people the world over, there is one place which comes up more than any other. For most people, the most beautiful place in the world is the place they grew up. The way the air feels, the sounds the birds make, the amount of warmth and sunshine and rain and clouds, the angle of the sunlight on the hillsides in the spring, those sights, sounds and smells are what you were programmed with in the formative years of your life. For most people that is the way the world is supposed to be.

Abram came from the city of Ur. Strange name I know; spelled U-R. If you know your geography of modern Iraq, Ur was in the general vicinity of Basra. In Ur, there is a huge ancient temple constructed to a moon god. After 4,000 years, you can still visit the ruins. Archeologists calculate that this huge temple was built just a generation or two before the call of Abram in Genesis 12. So it seems that in the context of this state-sponsored religion, God called to Abram, ***“Leave your country.”*** In God’s eyes the religious conditions in that place required that His people leave their nation.

Living there in Ur with his father and brothers, Abram was called. At that point Abram’s entire clan—father, brothers, and others—moved about half-way to Canaan. They moved 500 miles north-west and settled along the modern Syria-Iraq border. Abram would never go back.

***“Leave your people…”*** Abram’s family lived there for a while—we really don’t know how many years—but until his father died. At the death of his father, the Lord called Abram again. The 500 mile move, on foot, had not been enough. That 500 mile move had been huge, but he was still in the Mesopotamian culture. God now called Abram completely out of that river valley culture to a hill country culture. The Lord took Abram another 400 miles on foot – with wife and household – to Canaan, what is now Israel. To put it in our context, the first move was from Kentucky to Texas. The second move was from Texas to Mexico. The first was the longer distance, the second the bigger move in culture and lifestyle.

“Abram, ***leave your people***, leave your culture, leave the rhythm of life.” Abram was now called to live in a place where he would be a foreigner. People dressed differently. They ate different food. They spoke a very different language. They worshiped different gods. Everything was different. Abram would never go back to his home culture.

As if leaving country and culture was not enough, the Lord said, ***“Leave you father’s household.”*** In a day before Medicare and social security, before pensions and assisted living, your family, your children, or if you didn’t have children, the extended family took care of you in old age. ***“Leave your father’s household, Abram.”*** “But God, I don’t have any children.” ***“Leave your father’s household, Abram.”*** “But God you don’t understand, I am 75 old. Who will take care of me in my old age?” ***“Leave your father’s household.”*** Abram never came back to his family either.

“Abram,” says the Lord, ***‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”*** This was not a win-win situation! But you will say that we Christians know that God uses all things for our good. Yes, he does. And I am glad you know that, because God uses all things, even bad things, for our good. But read your Bibles and you will not find a Christianity without cost. Jesus told us to “count the cost”; to “take up our cross” – a splintery, heavy, plank of suffering. He told us, *“Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”* Jesus said all of those things in our Gospel reading.

People who imagine that Christianity is always a win-win situation do not know Biblical Christianity. People who imagine that Christianity is life without pain or anxiety do not have a Biblical Christianity.

In fact, I can say those are the promises of Satan. Look at Satan’s promises. He promises what God cannot promise. He promises things that satisfy us now—now! Why wait? Satan promises things that people respect, God promises things that are objects of ridicule. For example, many more people will respect a man who can hold his liquor more than one who is disciplined in prayer. Satan’s promises things that many people can possess here and now, not things far off in another land. Satan promises things that are often easy, enjoyable. God’s will often is tied to the frightening routine of self-discipline

Sometimes we need to make choices, tough choices, choices between what appeals to us and what we know to be right. There is always a “win” in God’s way. Sometimes it is “win-win”, but sometimes it is “lose-win”.

This very morning there is a young Christian man at a university. He is supposed to be at a dorm orientation class at 9am central time, this morning. He has decided that he is going to church at 8am, and if it takes him until 9:45 or 10am to get to orientation, so be it. Will it be win-win or lose-win. I pray for a win-win situation. I pray that people will notice and be interested in what motivates him to put God first, and that other Christians will likewise be encouraged to make God a priority in their lives, and to tell this world to take a back seat. I pray it is so. But maybe it won’t be that way. Maybe it will mark him as odd and old-fashioned. Maybe fellow students will say, “People still believe that stuff?” when he shows up 45 minutes late because of church. Which will it be? It hasn’t happened yet, so I can’t know. Maybe it will be lose-win, maybe win-win. But the second half of that equation I do know for certain: it will be a win situation in the end because it is obedience to what God has said, and God promises his blessing.

I will also be interested to hear what our guest, Chris Driesbach, has to say along these lines in his concert and presentation after worship. After 40 years of work and acquaintances and friends without God, I do really wonder what God’s call meant in his life. Lose-WIN? Win-WIN? I can’t wait to hear. Either way it’s a testimony to God’s faithfulness because it ends in a win.

Where is God calling you to leave something? Sports for the kids, or catechism and worship on Sunday morning? Which one? Eating out a couple more times a month, or maintaining what we have decided in our hearts to give to God – 5% or 10% or 15% of our income? Which one? Will you perpetuate the gossip or to shut it down? Will you help the helpless, assist the driver with a flat tire, seek the spiritually lost—or continue with life as usual?

***“Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”***

II. Short-term loss for long-term gain

How could Abram do that? How could he give up his homeland, his culture, his family, to go to a place he did not know? When God told Abram to leave everything, he also said, ***“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*** Abram did not act on blind faith. It was faith based on something: God’s faithful promises. Abram’s obedience, his willingness to take up a cross, to count and pay the cost, was based on God’s faithful promises. He knew that he could count on God giving him something better.

The dearest, the most precious of these promises was the last one: ***“all people on earth will be blessed through you.”*** It was that special promise of a Savior, a Savior for all people. Jesus is that special blessing from Abram’s family. He covers the sins of all who fall short of perfect devotion to God’s call. Jesus is the payment for our sins so that we can appear before God for Jesus’ sake. So throw away the chump change of this world’s promises that last a short time. Treasure the solid gold bullion of Jesus’ sufferings and death for our eternal life. What riches! Live for that. Empty your pockets of the pennies, nickels and dimes of this world’s pleasures and treasures. Make room for treasure that does not spoil!

*“[Abram and Sarai] were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth... If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”*Abram and Sarai never did come back. They were going to a better place. Amen.