

The St. John's Pulpit

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THE JOURNEY OF LISTENING

A Pastoral Homily Based Upon Genesis 12:1-3

Summer Series – “STORIES TO HELP US GROW: For the Bible Tells Us So”

Sunday, June 24, 2018

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We heard crying this week and, as crying almost always does, the cries upset us. When you hear a cry in your home or in your neighborhood, you move toward the pain and suffering. When you hear someone crying, you hear a Voice beyond the crying calling you to ‘do something.’

This weekend, pulpits will offer explanations and lamentations over what is happening at our southern border. We must not ignore this crisis; nor should we ignore those situations which cause episodes such as these to exist - abuse, exploitation, starvation, forced enlistment in military groups, violence, oppression, famine, natural disaster, a need for and willingness to work, a vision for a better life for their children, etc. These curses upon humanity must be met by God's people of blessing.

For seven centuries, people have been landing on the shores and crossing the borders of this land. But, this is more than the story of our nation. Human history is a long story of the great family of humanity continually learning how to live together, exploring the borders between us. The common-sense adage, “*Good fences make good neighbors,*” is always bumping up against the godly idea of, “*welcoming the stranger.*” These two concepts of safety and hospitality collide among us and within us.

Abraham was very much like you. He wanted to be alive. He wanted his life to matter. He desired meaning and purpose. He was a person who listened for the Voice of One God during a time when people believed in many gods. There were many ways for him to perceive his life in his world. Our ancestor, Abraham, heard a call from The Living God which involved a promise and a purpose.

TWO THOUGHTS: Using this story of the call of Abraham, consider two ideas - Your Power to Bless; and Your Methods Matter.

1. Your Power to Bless

Myron Madden begins his book, *The Power to Bless*, by saying, “*The greatest power in primitive religion was ‘the power of curse.’*” We still see and hear the power of curse every day. A new power shows up in Abraham; the power to bless. Being in a sanctuary on a beautiful Sunday morning in June, you reveal that you have a vision for the world. You have heard God's call to bless; to welcome inspired ideas and visions into your life allowing them to transform you, so you can be involved in substantive actions of faithfulness. You are always learning how to filter out some perspectives and filter through other perspectives as you develop your vision. Your vision changes over time; at times clear and at other times less clear. Theologically speaking, this is called ‘spiritual formation.’ You allow God's Spirit revealed in Jesus to be the guide for your journey of listening. I know you well enough to know you desire to bless the world and transform its curses through a compassionate life. You desire to bless others. You seek to be peace-builders, servants of others, missionally involved in the needs of humanity. You orient your life to be active blessings – not merely spectators. This power to bless is God's call to you and God's mission for you.

2. Your Methods Matter.

Rick Warren wrote a book entitled, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. It has good messages inside. It proposes your life should be driven by the Purpose of God – the Mission of God – to be blessings. Of course, many people filter through the idea of being driven without allowing the purpose of God to be a factor in their life equation. Many people are driven by visions disconnected from God's purpose. These are curse-driven people? You may put up

with them; but most of you do not enjoy them. These curse driven people do not listen well; they hear their own voice above all others. They are self-absorbed, over valuing their views of reality while devaluing all others. Curse driven people are often successful in some endeavors according to ungodly measurements of success. They become successful by being defensive, myopic, cruel, insecure, boastful, imposing, manipulative, abusive, lonely, greedy, fearful, revengeful, arrogant, tyrannical, over-confident, hypocritical, dishonest and project a superiority that turns your stomach. It is impossible to be a selfishly-driven person and an actively faithful obedient follower of Jesus. Curse-driven people tell you that if you are not driven like them, then you are an pathetic failure. Wrong! The opposite of being a curse-driven person is to be a called person.

This world needs fewer people who are curse driven and more people who are called to bless.

You are a called person. You have responded to a Voice outside of yourself; a Voice more powerful than your own that humbles your voice to your core. When you are a called person, you are humbled – but, not downtrodden. You are uplifted in a spiritual and relational awareness awakening you to your true value as God’s child. You see God’s vision for the common good that both transcends and unites all other visions. When you are called, you can be assured, committed, bold, persistent, competent, steadfast, brave, trusting, secure, inter-dependent, collaborative, servant-oriented and actively faithful. When you are called, you move into the world, not to be master, but to serve The Master. Your Methods Matter.

This Bible story of Abraham helps us grow as the-called-people of God. Abraham heard God’s call to live toward God’s vision. All Abraham had was a call, a promise and a purpose. His promise was that he would become the patriarch of a great family of blessing. His purpose was to be a blessing. With these words to Abraham, God revealed a plan to redeem the world. Abraham had to do two things: first, he had to leave his familiar life behind and second, he had to entrust his life to follow God in actively faithful ways.

Beloved, you are the called people of God. As you follow God on this journey of listening and following God’s call, you open your life to be shaped and formed and guided by the teachings and lifestyle practices of Jesus. Along the journey, you carry within you God’s promise pronounced by Jesus that you will never be alone, never abandoned nor forsaken; you will always be empowered by God’s Holy Presence. You also carry within you the purpose of God’s mission incarnated and taught by Jesus; you are blessings by loving one another; loving your neighbor as you need to be loved; and being witnesses of God’s love toward all other people of the world. When you committed your life to follow Jesus, you became a ‘disciple of blessing.’ Curse-driven people want to have a great name without being a blessing. This is not how God works; The Bible tells us so.

To be God’s people of blessing in today’s world, you must leave your comfort zone and follow God in actively faithful ways. And, you know the way to be a blessing; YOU LISTEN FOR GOD’S VOICE.

You hear God’s Voice when you hear the cries of others’ in their pain, sorrow, need and suffering. Jesus said, *“As often as you hear them, you hear me.”* Where do you hear God crying today? Along the Mexican border? Do you hear cries from our public schools? Do you hear voices of need among immigrants in our city? Do you hear God’s call in the voices of the people in Nyarweng, South Sudan? Do you hear planet earth and creation crying out to you? Do you hear the homeless or the hungry of Charlotte? Do you have a neighbor, relative or friend who is suffering? What pain calls to your heart today as you listen to the heart of God calling to you in the cries of people? The people of curse are causing God to cry out in pain. God calls you to live a journey of listening, so you can be God’s people of blessing.

TAKE A MOMENT NOW JUST TO LISTEN FOR GOD’S VOICE IN THE CRIES OF THE WORLD!