



**Westminster**  
**Presbyterian Church**  
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### **Where Danger Lies** **Genesis 12:1-5**

Shortly after being called to my first pastorate, back in 1983, the movie *Yentl* came out that starred Barbara Streisand. The movie blended drama and comedy. It was the story of a Jewish girl growing up in Poland in the early twentieth century. Her greatest desire was to study, but being a woman, she was forbidden to study the Talmud and Torah. However, when her father died, she dressed like a man and entered the Yeshiva in Bychawa. Yes, it was a comedy; however, there was a line in one of the songs that has stuck with me from the beginning of my ministry to this very moment. I cannot remember the name of the song, but this is the line, “Sometimes where danger lies, there the sweetest of pleasures are found.”

I have served the church as a pastor for 34 years, and looking back over my ministry, I find great truth in this wisdom. “Sometimes where danger lies, there the sweetest of pleasures are found.” I only wish I had trusted more and been more willing to face danger or difficult challenges, but on those occasions, throwing caution to the wind, and trusting God with the results, I know that it is where danger lies that we find life’s greatest joys and fulfillment. You see, to work hard to realize God’s will for my life and for the church takes faith, and faith always leads us into the unknown. And even when the danger involved is realized, and if we must suffer in doing what God calls us to do, the suffering is well worth it. For our joy and contentment come from accomplishing the will of God. And we are called in faith and move the gospel forward, with love and with hope.

When I face those times, when I know what is the right thing to do, I know what God is calling me to do, but I am simply afraid of the danger or the challenge, it is time to listen to God’s word. And today the word takes us back to Genesis, to remember the lives of Abraham and Sarah, a couple that had their ups and downs, but in obedience to God’s call to face the unknown they found their lives’ purpose.

It has been over four thousand years since God approached Abraham and offered him a promise. It was a promise with no upfront rewards, no signing

bonuses, simply a promise to be fulfilled if Abraham and Sarah would leave their secure surroundings of home and follow where God led.

Hear the word as I read Genesis 12:1-5:

**<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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.”**

**<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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.**

“Sometimes where danger lies, there the sweetest of pleasures are found.” Though these words are not in Holy Scripture, this theme reoccurs over and over in the Scriptures, and in the story of Abraham and Sarah we have one of the best examples of this principle.

When Abraham and Sarah were young newlyweds, they lived in the commercial city of Ur. The city’s archeological remains are found close to the Persian Gulf, near the border of Iraqi and Kuwait. During Abraham’s time the city was in decline, so Abraham and Sarah traveled with their father and Abraham’s nephew Lot 650 miles up the Euphrates River and started a new life. His brother Haran, Lot’s father had died, and in honor of Abraham’s brother they named the place they settled Haran. If you could find Haran today it would probably somewhere in eastern Syria.

When Abraham’s father died, Abraham became the family patriarch. And there in Haran, Abraham made his fortune off the land. It had been a good life, and now Abraham and Sarah were up in years. They were no longer newlyweds dreaming about a family, but a childless elderly couple in their seventies. Can you imagine what it is like to be an elderly couple in your seventies who’s greatest longing has yet to be fulfilled? Well, maybe you can.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, Almighty God spoke to Abraham. Maybe it was an audible voice, maybe a dream or a vision, but God came to Abraham with a proposition, **“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house**

**to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you.”**

Abraham and Sarah were to leave their business, their friends, their sphere of influence, their security, to follow God’s leading, and all God had to offer was a promise. Of course, it was a whopper of a promise. It was not simply the promise of children, but the promise of a nation. Wow!

In Haran, Abraham could reach out and touch his securities. He could see and measure and make fairly accurate predictions about what the future held. In Haran, Abraham knew where his next meal was coming from, he knew where he would lay his head at night, and he knew where he would be buried. There were few uncertainties. But to pack up and follow this voice that he understood as the voice of God took faith—a whole lot of faith.

But where danger lies, sometimes that is where the sweetest of pleasures are found, so Abraham and Sarah with their nephew Lot left behind their safe world to venture out into the unknown with hope in a promise from God.

And you know what was amazing? Abraham did not ask any questions. God called Abraham. And God made a promise to Abraham and the next verse says, **“So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.”**

Now I know this is a biblical account that reports what someone did 4,000 years ago. We are proud of Abraham and Sarah; we may even be inspired by this couple’s faith. But let’s get real, this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we cannot just pack up and follow God. People will think we are crazy.

Someone said, “I haven’t seen Abraham and Sarah lately. They are not in church, their house looks empty. What happened to them?”

“Well I heard Abraham lost his mind. They say he started talking to God. He has to be crazy.”

“That sounds crazy to me, but what happened to them?”

“No one knows. They just left town one morning and no one has seen them since.”

“I guess that is what happens when crazy people start claiming to hear the voice of God.”

I can only imagine the conversations of those who knew Abraham in Haran, but we know that God actually spoke to Abraham as God continues to speak to his

people. I know that God speaks to us. We may ignore that holy voice, but God speaks all the same.

Well, as I often do, I am getting a little ahead of myself. So let's go back to Abraham. There he is traveling south to Canaan. At a ripe old age, he was doing what was surely crazy to those who knew him. Maybe his friends tried to talk him out of leaving Haran on just a promise. "Abraham, what's going to happen if God does not come through with his promise? You are going to lose everything you worked so hard for. Why would you give up the great life you have here in Haran?"

Well Abraham followed; he packed up all the belongings he, Sarah and Lot could carry and followed God with the conviction that "where danger lies, there the sweetest of pleasures are found." And you Biblical scholars know that God fulfilled God's promise. We need to look no farther than the first verse of the New Testament to understand how the promise was fulfilled. Hear Matthew 1:1, "**A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David,**" and what comes next, "**the son of Abraham.**"

Abraham became to the Apostle Paul a paradigm of faith. To the Galatians, Paul wrote, "**Consider Abraham, 'He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'** Understand then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announce the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham the man of faith."

Sometimes I worry about my faith. Sometimes I feel as though the Holy Spirit, the power which dwells within, convincing us that God can be trusted, the Spirit that would causes us to take chances for Jesus Christ and give us the power to follow, has stopped moving in my life. As a matter of fact, sometimes I wonder about the faith of the church. Sometimes I wonder if we have become so set in our ways that any new idea from the Spirit of God will cause us to cringe.

I struggle with my faith. Confronted with the teachings of Jesus, I find that I fall so very short of his standard. How about you? Do you think it just may be possible that God is calling us? Is it possible that God has something in mind for us to do as a church that will be a blessing to others?

When God called Abraham, God said, "Abraham, I am going to bless you so that you will be a blessing to others." That is the purpose of God's blessing.

God's blessing is not received selfishly; God's blessing is to be used in the lives of others.

Let me give you an idea of what that looks like. Abraham and Sarah were blessed beyond measure, and they used their blessing to bless not only me but millions of people. Well, in this case rather than Abraham and Sarah, their names were Millard and Linda. I am quite confident most you have heard of them.

Millard had a gift for making money. As a college student in Alabama, he made \$50,000 selling cookbooks. Now we are talking about the 1950's when \$50,000 was a whole lot of money for a college student to make. Millard received a degree in law and became a lawyer, and he made more money. One day his financial secretary came to his office and said, "Congratulations, Millard, you are a millionaire. Now what is next?" Millard did not have to think twice, but he blurted out, "Ten million dollars, of course!"

And he did and continued to make money, and with his money he bought it all. He lived in a mansion in an exclusive neighborhood in Montgomery, Alabama. He had everything: boats, two other houses, one on a lake and one in the mountains. His garage was filled with sports cars and luxury cars. That was his drive, to use his God given gifts to bless his own life. And ironically, this drive affected his health and his marriage.

One day Linda packed her bags, told Millard she was leaving and headed for New York. The separation did not last long, for shortly thereafter, Millard flew to New York to find Linda. When he arrived, he checked into a hotel, he called Linda, and arranged a meeting. That night he turned on the television. I don't know what show he was watching. It must have been a religious station, for a missionary was being interviewed. This missionary lived in China, and while in China she met a very wise sage, who told her words that Millard never forgot. The words, "A planned life can only be endured."

Something clicked, and Millard understood that he was only enduring life, certainly a life of luxury, but rather than enjoying life he realized he was only enduring life. Something very important was missing.

He grew up in the Christian Church. He had heard all the sermons about Jesus. His attendance was regular. But something was wrong.

When he met with Linda, the couple had a heart to heart talk. They talked about their life together and that they were simply enduring rather enjoying life to the fullest. And it dawned on them what was missing. They were blessed, but

forgot the part about using one's talents and resources, one's blessings to bless others. And you know what they did? Well, to make a very long story very short, they made the decision to sell what they owned and keep only what they needed and then used the proceeds and their talents to bless others.

I know you have heard of Millard and Linda Fuller. Millard died eight years ago. Linda is still alive and is known as the First Lady of Affordable of Housing. Yes, the couple used their blessings to bless others and founded Habitat for Humanity.

You know, I had several opportunities to meet Millard Fuller, and in using his blessings to bless others, I met a man who was joyful, content, and gave thanks that he could be used by God to make housing affordable to millions of people all over the world.

Like Abraham and Sarah and Millard and Linda, we have been blessed by their example of faith. We have been blessed with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have been blessed with salvation that comes through grace alone, received by faith. That is our message with which are to bless others, but never forget that we, through baptism, are blessed with Jesus Christ, and we are blessed to be worthy of carrying out his ministry in the world.

Do you remember Jesus announcing to the people in his home town, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor? He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Do you remember that Jesus told us that we are to keep the entire law, but the way to keep the law is to love our neighbors? Yes, our message is salvation in Christ, but that message is proclaimed by the depths of our love for others, and to what extent we will go to show the love of God to everyone.

My friends, sometimes I feel like my love has been put in a box. Sometimes I feel like the church has joined me in that little confining box. For we are to love, and I wonder how our love is shown to the old poverty stricken woman who cannot even afford the water for a bath. How is that love expressed to the Syrian family who has lost everything because of ISIS, and now resides with a million other people in a dusty refugee camp? How is that love expressed to the alien who lives among us, especially when the Bible says from cover to cover to care for those who are alien? How is that love expressed to the poor people in Kivalina, Alaska

who have to abandon their town because for whatever reason the globe is warming and their town is being pulled down into the depths of the sea?

It seems that in all the crises that face our community, our nation and the entire world, that everything has become political, and since it is political the church has nothing to say.

Racism, well, you cannot talk about racism because Black Lives Matter has made it political.

Our relationship with Islam, well, that has to be put aside because the idea of radical Islam has become political.

Immigration, well, the politicians are talking about building a wall, so it's become too political for the church to have a word to say.

Global warming – well, that affects our entire economy, thus becoming too political to be in bounds for us.

Health care, yes we serve the great healer, but the topic is far too political for the church.

Yet sometimes where danger lies, there the sweetest of pleasures are found. We have been blessed and we have the resources to make a difference, and we have a word to say. Now by faith do we respond to the call of God? Do we, who should be inspired by the faith of Abraham and Sarah to simply go where God tells us to go, do we go, or hold back in safety?

I wonder if we even understand what our word would be as followers of Jesus Christ to the victims of racism. As followers of Jesus Christ, what words do we have to share to the Islamic people living in our country that are looked upon with suspicion because there are some Islamic people who are acting like the people who perpetuated Christendom in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, who promoted terrorism during the crusades? As followers of Jesus Christ, what word do we have to share, and what actions are we to promote in finding solutions to the problems that are caused and will be caused by the burning of fossil fuels? And as followers of Jesus what word do we have to say about health care in our country?

Brothers and sisters, we are blessed beyond measure. Now as followers of Jesus Christ, how are we going to bless as Jesus blessed? How do we proclaim good news to the poor? How do we proclaim freedom to the captives? How do we bring healing to those who are blind? This is the year of our Lord's favor and we had better understand what our message is, even in our political world, as we

follow the one who gave his life for us. What word do we have to proclaim and practice? Amen.