

## Be a Blessing

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, October 4, 2009)

Genesis 12:1-3 (TEV) <sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s home, and go to a land that I am going to show you. <sup>2</sup>I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
But I will curse those who curse you.  
And through you I will bless all the nations.”

Luke 10:1-9, 17 <sup>1</sup>After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, “**The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.** <sup>3</sup>Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup>Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup>Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ <sup>6</sup>And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup>Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. <sup>8</sup>Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup>cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ <sup>10</sup>But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup>‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ <sup>12</sup>I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

<sup>17</sup>The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!”

At the time of Abraham, the patriarch of Israel, the known world, to him, was small. In fact, nations were even referred to sometimes as families. Out of all the families in that small world, God called Abraham and blessed him. He promised Abraham that he would become a great nation. His descendents would be as many as the stars in the heavens and as the sands of the sea. Abraham trusted God, and his trust pleased God. And so God blessed Abraham, and his descendents. But somewhere along the way, Abraham’s descendents forgot that last phrase of the blessing: **Through you I will bless all the nations.** Such an important task! How could they overlook this key part of their mission?

The descendants of Abraham became a mighty nation. They engaged in battles with their neighbors. God blessed them with strength and they conquered. Their kings became powerful, took many wives, built beautiful castles. They plundered and destroyed their enemies. But they seemed to forget that last phrase: **Through you I will bless all the nations.**

In the years that followed, the nation of Israel lost its greatness. But they still remembered God’s promise, especially the promise that there would come another one, like their greatest king, David, and this one would save them from their greatest enemy. So they looked for a Messiah, one that would overthrow the occupying forces. They looked for a Messiah that would crush their enemies and restore them to greatness in the world. But they still didn’t think about that important part of God’s blessing: **Through you I will bless all the nations.**

In our Gospel lesson we read about Jesus appointing 70 missionaries to go ahead of him to every town and place where he himself intended to go. There is some possible symbolism in this event in the number 70. If you read the tenth chapter of Genesis, one of the most boring, complicated chapters of the Old Testament, you will find a list of all the descendants of Noah. When you read this list carefully, knowing the names of the tribes and nations of that small world that existed at the time of Moses, you will find that there are 70 families or nations in that account. According to the understanding of the people of Israel, even in the time of Christ, there were 70 nations or families that comprised the whole world. And so Jesus' act of sending out 70 becomes a symbolic act, an act representing that he is sending his disciples out into the whole world, to all families!

We also understand that after Christ's resurrection and ascension, he is still present in the world. His presence is through his disciples – his body is the church. And so Jesus sends out these 70 to prepare the way for his own arrival in every nation, an arrival that in fact is the establishment of the church in every nation of the world, even though we now know that there are far more nations than that number 70. But whatever the number is today, it is still our commission to take the Gospel to all nations, to be the presence of Christ in all nations as the church universal, and to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to all people. Or as God said to Abraham, **through you I will bless all the nations.**

Today, we are the ones who have inherited the blessing of Abraham. The church has received the blessing and has been charged with the mission. Through us, all families of the earth are to be blessed. Today, we are the new Israel, God's people. Through Christ, the invitation to membership in "God's family" has been extended to all people. Through us, all families and all nations are called to join the family of God.

Today, we not only receive the body of Christ in Holy Communion, we ARE the body of Christ. It is our mission to go ahead of him to all nations and prepare them for the arrival of our Lord. We are sent out to all families, just as Jesus sent out those 70. It is our mission to extend the body of Christ to all nations and to all families. That is the blessing for all nations.

Today, will you receive the blessing of Abraham? Or even more important, will you be a blessing to all families? Can you begin with those who live just down the street, and then even reach around the world as you strengthen others who are doing so on our behalf?

This is still God's command to us, today, "**through you I will bless all the nations.**" Let us each be a blessing to others. Amen.