

“God Builds a Nation”

Genesis 12

Oct. 11, 2015

In many TV action series, the show will begin with a review. Let's do that with The Story revealed in the Bible. Last Sunday we discovered that God's vision in creation is to be with us and stay in wonderful relationship with us. Sadly Adam and Eve chose a different vision and sin and the sinful nature entered the human race. Yet, God passionately and tirelessly pursues us at great cost.

Today in the second part of the Story, we discover that God decides to build a nation and through that new nation, get us back to home, to God. In short, God builds a new nation to reveal God and God's plan to get us back.

Building a new nation. To do so, God chose who? Yes, God chose Abram and Sarai. The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.” Hebrews 11:8 reads, “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”

He obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he going. What a faith! How do you define faith? One participant at a small group session defined faith this way. Paraphrasing, “Faith is doing what we are called to do by God without knowing where it leads us.” I would like to add one line at the end of this definition: trusting God. Trusting: The following funny story comes to my mind whenever the word, Trust, comes in conversation.

A man was walking in the mountains just enjoying the scenery. While walking, in his surprise, he stepped too close to the edge of the mountain and started to fall. In desperation he reached out and grabbed a limb of a gnarly old tree hanging onto the side of the cliff. Full of fear, he assessed his situation. He was about 100 feet down a sheer cliff and about 900 feet from the floor of the canyon below. If he should slip again he'd plummet to his death. Full of fear, he cries out, "Help me!" But there was no answer. Again and again he cried out but to no avail. Finally he yelled, "Is anybody up there?" A deep yet serene voice replied, "Yes, I'm up here." "Who is it?" "It's God." "Can you help me?" "Yes, I can help." "Please help me then!" "Let yourself go." Looking around, the man became full of panic. "What?!?!" "Let yourself go. I will catch you." "Uh... Is there anybody else up there?"

Trusting is not an easy thing to do. Abram obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. Wow. Abram let go and let God. He obeyed and went. And God said him, “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.” God commanded. Abram obeyed. God's plan to get us back home developed.

But guess what. The Story tells that this “Building a new nation” project encountered a couple of turbulent beginnings.

The first one was something to do with Sarai, Abram's wife. She, getting older and anxious, sensed that she gotta do something to help God carrying out His “building a new nation” project. So she proposed her own way to start the new nation. (Genesis 16) Ishmael was born to Abram and Sarai. But Ishmael was not in God's plan.

God promised their own son when Abram and Sarai, at 100 and 90 respectively. Sarai laughed at this preposterous word of the LORD. The supernatural boy who is born to them is named Isaac which means “laughter.” Genesis 18

Testing Abraham was something God did in the beginning phase of the building a new nation project. God wanted to see how pure and authentic his faith was. So God commanded him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. (Genesis 22) When God came to Abram to tell him to sacrifice his son, many believe that Isaac was now a teenager around 15 years old. That would make Abraham 115 and Sarah 105, optimal years for raising a teenager.

Abraham obediently responds again, believing that God could raise his beloved son to life from the dead. You know the rest of the story. Isaac is spared and a ram is offered in sacrifice.

“By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” 19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.” Hebrews 11:17-19

And we know God’s story continues through Isaac and his wife, Rebecca. They had a twin, Esau and Jacob. And Jacob had 12 sons, one of them is Joseph. God’s plan slowly got realized generation from generation as Abraham’s descendants grew in numbers.

What do we learn from the second part of the God’s Grand story?

The first lesson: We are not making the building up a new nation project possible but God is. "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine." (Isaiah 55:8)

“Didn’t God say God will make us into a great nation? Didn’t God say God will make our name great, and we will be a blessing and all peoples on earth will be blessed through us? But what is going on? I have been waiting but nothing really happened. No baby. And look! Abram and I are getting older and older. We understand her, don’t we?” Sarai decided to take a move. She decided to help “God” carry out God’s plan. So she came up with a plan. Hagar, her servant gave birth to a baby boy, Ishmael. I am sure her intention was good. But Ishmael was not in God’s project.

It is hard to be patient, isn’t it? I don’t know about your thoughts on our ministry. I want to see the ministry and mission of Fairfield Grace growing and multiplying rather at a speedy pace. I want many, young and old, to respond to God’s love through Christ and do participate at our ministry and mission with joy and enthusiasm. Right away. The more I hope things happening, the more I become anxious.

Wait. We gotta wait. We gotta follow Jesus, the head of the church. His time is different from our time. We synchronize our time with God’s time.

Dr. Koshuke Koyama, late theologian who taught me at Union Theological Seminary, taught us how slowly God journeys. You know the people of God journeyed in the wilderness for 40 years before crossing over the Jordan River to the land of Canaan. Dr. Koyama explained that it is 120 miles distance between Egypt to Canaan, if you travel straightforwardly. God led His people 40 years in the wilderness. So he figured that actually God walked and journey with His people at 3 miles per year speed.

From where we are to Fairfield Metro station behind the Staples are exactly 3 miles. Can you imagine that you walk to there from here for one year long? We, fast-moving people, need to “hold our horses” and synchronized with God’s time. We gotta stop and ask God on and off, “Am I not too fast? Am I not jumping the gun? Am I in line with your timeline? Are we not too fast? Are we following God in front?”

The second lesson: In the second part of the Story, we discover that God reveals a peculiar pattern in his work. That is that God chooses unlikely people for His project. Abram and Sarai are not the smartest, the most beautiful and handsome with the best resumes. They don't look a wonderful candidate for the vision of God, do they? But God chooses them.

Then, why? Why did God choose the most unlikely people upon which build a new nation? God chose this old and unlikely and ordinary couple, so that all people would look to God, knowing that all that happens is done by God and God is the one who carries out God's plan, not us.

This gives us today a lot of hope. You are not disqualified to be used greatly in God's great Story? I am not, either, for sure. But you may reveal God, too, and reflect God's plan to bring people back home. I may reveal God, too. Didn't Jesus call ordinary people as his disciples? Didn't they turn the world upside down with the Good News of Jesus Christ?

But we have many excuses not to take part in God's plan. "I am too old. I am too poor. I am not good enough. I am not worth enough. I am not strong enough. Some say, "I am too young. I am inexperienced. I am too busy." Even some one says, "I am not interested." Our excuses know no boundary. We need to remind of ourselves: It is not about you. It is not about me. It is about God and God's plan to get the world back home.

When I was in Huntington, CT, serving Huntington UMC about 20 years ago, I had a really difficult time as I arrived there. Several church families left the church when my predecessor left abruptly. The administrative assistant at the church and school office embezzled more than 10 gran. It was mess. I did not know what to do. It was my first appointment as a solo pastor. How many weeks didn't I have sleepless nights. One morning, on the way to the church office, I went to the sanctuary and sat in front and prayed. "Why me?" "Why all this mess?" "What should I do?" "What shall I do?" "How" Out of desperation, my eyes were full of tears. Then, something strange happened in front me. I saw my Lord, Jesus coming down from the cross and spoke to me. Yes, that was exactly I experienced. The Lord said, "Kun Sam, why you worry? Why are you anxious? Don't worry. Don't be anxious. Don't be discouraged. I take care of it. Remember It is not your church. It is mine." It was a turning point in my ministry life. It is God. It is at God's time. God works in our midst.

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing, put me to suffering;

let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

exalted for you, or brought low for you;

let me be full,

let me be empty,

let me have all things,

let me have nothing:

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things

to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

I went to Flushing, Queens last Sunday afternoon to join other Korean Methodist Christians to celebrate the 130th anniversary of Henry Appenzeller mission in Korean peninsula. Henry and his wife at age 27 traveled to Korea by ship and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ passionately, building schools and educating children and youth. As a result of their ministry in Korea, now Churches in Korea send out missionaries to all over the

world. I believe I am one of them. Henry Appenzeller, a young man from Madison, New Jersey, was God's instrument to get people back to God through Christ Jesus. Next year we are celebrating our 60th anniversary. God has been working through many faithful members and is still working through you and me. I believe God has a grand plan for His church, His people here at Fairfield Grace.

So we say once again, "Here I am, Lord. Send me." Yes, as someone says, it is not about you, it is not about me. It is about God and God's vision and God's plan to get the world back home. "Here I am, Lord. Use me for your Kingdom project" Hallelujah!