

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

(Genesis 12: 1-4a)

- Intro: His name was Alfred von Rohr Sauer.
- For years he had been Professor of Old Testament.
 - #Concordia Seminary.
 - *St. Louis.
 - #Concordia Seminary-in-Exile.
 - *Seminex.
 - +My alma mater.
 - He taught me and many other seminarians.
 - #Prophets.
 - #Prophecy.
 - I called him Moses on the bicycle.
 - #He looked like Moses.
 - *Long white hair.
 - *Thick white beard.
 - #He rode a bicycle.
 - *During his teaching career.
 - *Long after he retired.
 - When he turned 75.
 - #He decided it was time to start a new career.
 - *He left St. Louis--temporarily.
 - *He moved to Chicago.
 - +To enter a program of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).
 - =At Lutheran General Hospital.
 - =In Park Ridge, Illinois.
 - +To train to be a chaplain.
 - =He even shaved off his white beard.
 - To keep from scaring hospital patients.
 - #So that when he walked into a hospital room.
 - #People wouldn't think:
 - *They had died and gone to heaven.
 - *When he completed his chaplaincy training.
 - +He moved back to St. Louis.
 - +He began volunteering as a chaplain.
 - =At a hospital a block from his house.
 - He didn't read the psalms to hospital patients.
 - He had them memorized.
 - +He did that until the day he died.

Alfred von Rohr Sauer had been blessed to be a blessing.

I. Abram (AKA Abraham—Genesis 17) Was Blessed To Be A Blessing.

A. He Was 75 Years Old.

1. When God told him:
 - a. It was time to move.
 - b. It was time to start a new career.
2. God called him to leave behind:
 - a. His country.
 - b. His relatives.
 - c. His father's house.
3. God promised to give him:
 - a. Land.
 - b. Great nation.
 - c. Great name.
4. Abram went.
 - a. Without knowing where he was going.
 - b. Without calling ahead to make a reservation.
-At Holy Land Inn Express.
 - c. Without a house hunting expedition.
 - d. Without checking out the school districts.
-Although he didn't yet have any children.
5. Abraham obeyed.
 - a. Because he believed.
 - b. Because he trusted the promises of God.

B. Abram Was Blessed To Be A Blessing.

1. God said:
 - a. "In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."
 - b. Genesis 12:3.
2. It was so.
 - a. The land was a blessing.
 - It could have been a curse.
 - Abram's nephew Lot went with him.
 - #When they got to the land of Canaan.
 - *Abram needed room for all of his livestock.
 - *Lot needed room for his.
 - #Their herdsmen started squabbling.
 - *Fighting over the land.
 - *Fighting over who should go where.

#Abram said to Lot:

*"Let's not fight."

*"There's plenty of land for all of us."

*"If you want to go to the left,"

+ "I'll go to the right."

*"If you want to go the right,"

+ "I'll go to the left."

=Genesis 13: 9.

#So the land became a blessing for both.

*Land became the source of their fortune.

b. Abraham's descendants became a blessing for others.

-Through Isaac.

#Philistines were blessed.

*Genesis 26: 26-31.

-Through Jacob.

#Laban was blessed.

*Genesis 30: 27.

-Through Joseph.

#Egyptians were blessed.

*Genesis 39: 5.

*Genesis 50: 20.

C. What Was So Special About Abram That He Should Be So Blessed?

1. Nothing really.

2. Abraham was 75 years old when God called him.

a. Hardly the age at which someone sets out to make his fortune.

b. Hardly the age at which someone chooses to start a family.

c. Hardly the age at which someone sets out to make a name for himself.

3. That's just the point.

a. These blessings were not Abraham's doing.

b. They were not Abraham's accomplishment.

4. These blessings were the good and gracious gifts of God.

a. Five times in the first three verses of Genesis 12.

-God says, "I will."

#"I will show you the land."

#"I will make of you a great nation."

#"I will make your name great."

#"I will bless those who bless you."

#"I will curse the one who curses you."

*Emphasis is on the blessing.

+ "Those" is plural.

*Rather than the cursing.

+ "One" is singular.

- b. What is special about Abraham is his faith.
 - He trusted the promises of God.
 - He believed that he had been blessed.
 - #So that he might be a blessing.

II. We Have Been Blessed To Be A Blessing.

A. We, As Individuals, Have Been Blessed To Be A Blessing.

1. What difference can one person make?
 - a. A lot.
 - b. One person can do a lot with a little.
2. My son Joel was a Boy Scout.
 - a. To become an Eagle Scout.
 - There are not only merit badges to be earned.
 - There is a community service project to be completed.
 - b. Joel's Eagle Scout project was to collect reading glasses for inmates.
 - It was my idea.
 - #But Joel did the work.
 - As a jail chaplain.
 - #I often got requests from inmates for large print Bibles.
 - *Which could get rather expensive.
 - *Most of those inmates didn't need large print Bibles.
 - *They needed reading glasses.
 - +Which most of them had no way of getting.
 - So I suggested to Joel that he might make that his project.
 - #Hoping that if he could collect 50 pairs of reading glasses.
 - *That would be great.
 - #Joel was more ambitious.
 - *He set a goal of 100 pairs of reading glasses.
 - #Do you know that Joel?
 - *Collected more than 450 pairs of reading glasses.
 - +Which he donated to the jail.
 - What a blessing!
 - #Joel was blessed to be a blessing.
 - #Each of us has been blessed to be a blessing.

B. We, As A Congregation, Have Been Blessed To Be A Blessing.

1. Yesterday our Church Council held a retreat.
 - a. One of the resources we used.
 - Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation.
 - #By Dave Daubert.
 - b. Daubert's book challenges us.
 - To think about new ways of being the church.

2. Traditional view of the church.
 - a. Membership model.
 - We need to get (more) members.
 - #To help us pay the bills.
 - So that we can continue to provide services.
 - #For our members.
 - #And maybe for any others.
 - *Who might become our members.
 - b. Please don't misunderstand.
 - I'm not opposed to:
 - #More members.
 - #Paying the bills.
 - #Serving our members.
 - But that is all about us, isn't it?
 - #Our members.
 - #Our programs.
 - #Our wants.
 - #Our needs.
 - #Our likes.
3. Another way to envision the church.
 - a. Mission model.
 - To use the imagery of Genesis 12.
 - #How has God blessed us?
 - #How can God use us to be a blessing to others?
 - That shifts the focus.
 - #From inside.
 - *To outside.
 - #From us.
 - *To others.
 - #From maintenance.
 - *To mission.
 - b. To be a blessing to others.
 - We may have to become like Abram.
 - We may have to be willing to leave some things behind.
 - #What we have always done.
 - #What I like.
 - #What is convenient for me.
 - We may have to go where we have never gone before.
 - c. That can be:
 - Uncomfortable.
 - Challenging.
 - Threatening.
 - #If we think we're doing this on our own.
 - #If we think we're in this by ourselves.

- #If we forget/forget to trust the promises of God.
- *"I will show you."
- *"I will bless you."
- *"I will make you a blessing."

III. I Received A Blessing This Week.

A. As I Was Doing My Homework For This Homily.

1. I rediscovered.
 - a. I knew this before.
 - b. But I had forgotten.
2. In Hebrew.
 - a. Word:
 - Barach.
 - #"To bless."
 - b. Also means:
 - "To kneel."
3. People often kneel to receive a blessing.
 - a. When I was confirmed.
 - I knelt before the altar.
 - #To receive a blessing.
 - b. When I was ordained.
 - I knelt before that same altar.
 - #To receive a blessing.
 - *Through the laying on of hands.
 - c. When you come to this altar.
 - You kneel (if your knees allow).
 - #Smaller children to receive a blessing.
 - *Through the laying on of hands.
 - #Rest of us to receive a blessing.
 - *Through the life-giving bread and wine.
 - +Of our Lord's body and blood.
 - We kneel to receive a blessing.
4. It occurred to me that the blessings of God.
 - a. Don't always come when we are lifted up in the eyes of the world.
 - Fame.
 - Fortune.
 - Children we can be proud of.
 - b. But sometimes when we are brought to our knees.
 - By sickness.
 - By financial difficulties.
 - By personal struggles.
 - By the challenge of being church together.

#When our blessings seem to have run out.
#When all we seem to be left with:
*Promises of God.

- B. God's Greatest Blessing For Us Brought Jesus To His Knees.
1. Night before his crucifixion.
 - a. Jesus knew what was going to happen.
 - b. Where was he?
 - He was on his knees.
 - #In the Garden of Gethsemane.
 - #Praying that his heavenly Father's will might be done.
 2. When Jesus was arrested.
 - a. He was whipped.
 - b. Even though there was no:
 - Camcorder.
 - I-phone.
 - #To record the beating.
 - c. I dare say it probably brought Jesus to his knees.
 3. On Good Friday.
 - a. Jesus was forced to carry his cross to Golgotha.
 - b. Weight of:
 - That cross.
 - Our sin.
 - God's judgement.
 - #Brought Jesus to his knees.
 4. But that cross that brought Jesus to his knees.
 - a. Has become our greatest blessing.
 - Greater than the blessings of Abram.
 - b. Our blessing.
 - Blessing of receiving God's name.
 - #In the life-giving waters of baptism.
 - Blessing of being made a part of God's family.
 - #Family of faith.
 - Blessing of inheriting our Promised Land.
 - #In the Kingdom of Heaven.
 - Blessing of being a blessing.
- C. We Are A Blessing To One Another.
1. When I was a chaplain.
 - a. Jail was a blessing for many.
 - To get some folks off of the streets.
 - #Before they got themselves killed.

- To get their lives turned around.
 - #Focused.
 - #Refocused.
 - *On God.
 - *On God's word.
- b. One inmate I remember.
 - Came to jail.
 - #Started reading his Bible.
 - #Completed a number of Bible correspondence courses.
 - *Which I passed out.
 - But he never came to:
 - #Bible study.
 - #Worship service.
 - I asked him about that one day.
 - #He said to me:
 - *"I don't need to come to church to worship God."
 - *"I can read my Bible in my cell."
 - *"I can pray in my cell."
 - *"I can worship in my cell."
 - #I said:
 - *"That's all true enough."
 - *"But when you do that,"
 - + "We miss out on the blessing you can be to us."
 - #I told him about the redwoods.
 - *I don't know if I've told you about the redwoods.
 - *I'm going to tell you again.
 - +Redwoods are the tallest trees on the face of the earth.
 - =Tallest redwood is more than 365' high.
 - Taller than a football field.
 - #Including both end zones.
 - Is long.
 - +But redwoods have a root system.
 - =Only about 10' deep.
 - Most trees have as much underground.
 - #As they do above ground.
 - But not redwoods.
 - #Their root system is very shallow.
 - #They are easily toppled.
 - *In a wind storm.
 - =When they grow alone.

- +But when they grow together.
 - =Grove.
 - =Forest.
 - Those root systems become intertwined.
 - #Providing support one for another.
 - Trees become windbreaks one for another.
 - #Providing protection one for another.
 - So that together those trees can grow:
 - #100s.
 - #1000s.
 - *Of years.
 - #To become the tallest trees on earth.

c. You are redwoods.

- Support for one another.
- Protection for one another.
- Blessings for one another.

2. When we had the memorial service for Shirley Johnson.

a. On Sunday morning.

- Three weeks ago.

b. Pews were full.

- Not jam packed.
- But fuller than they usually are.
 - #Except maybe on Easter.

c. I can only imagine what a blessing that was for Duane.

- That you were all here.

d. But I can tell you what a blessing it was for me.

- That you were all here.
- That the pews were so full.
 - #As God's blessings to me.
 - *I hope are a blessing to you.
 - #Please know that God's blessings to you.
 - *Are also a blessing to me.

Concl: God has blessed you.

God has blessed us.

- Blessed us to be a blessing.

