

Thanksgiving Service
Genesis 12.1-8
“Thanks for the Promises”

“7 The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

8 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.”

When I was 11, I got a spiderman glove. It was this red cloth glove that had a trigger on the palm, and I connected so that you could spray silly string from your wrist like spiderman. And let me tell you, it was awesome. And it was awesome for like eight and a half minutes when it broke. The point being that I had been begging and begging my parents for the 15\$ to buy it for months, and when they finally caved, I gave them a giant hug and was jumping up and down.

I mean, saying thank you comes extremely simply sometimes. On a birthday, or Christmas, or a special day, it's almost effortless to give thanks. And when things are going well, it's quite natural and appropriate to stop and to say a prayer of thanks to God for the things he has given to us when the house sells quickly, easily, and over asking. When the kids make the team after tryouts, and you're so happy for them. When you discuss getting married with your significant other, you both are on board and want to get married when you get a spiderman silly string shooter that you wanted. Thank you, Lord. All great gifts come from the hand of the Lord.

Throughout the Bible, we see great examples of God's gifts to his people and the thankful response that comes so easily with it. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, Moses and the whole company joined in a song of thanks. When King David was delivered from his enemies so many times, he wrote Psalms of thanksgiving. When Simeon finally got his wish to see the Messiah, he sang a song of thanks to God.

But what about he doesn't? When God doesn't give you the things you want? And we'll take it even a step further; what about when God takes something away from you. When the money doesn't come in as you're used to, and the budget no longer balances, and now there are hard decisions that need to be made. When God doesn't give health but is actually taking it away, Mom isn't getting better but has worsened. When the anxiety prescription doesn't go away but needs to be increased, and now with the days shorting, a depression prescription needs to be added on top of it. In reality, it seems like God isn't giving me much to be thankful for; why would I say thank you to God now?

In all these situations, there is someone who we can look to as an example: Abraham. At this point in his life, he was still called Abram, which means 'exalted Father'; but one day, God comes to this father of none with a message. This is the first time that we have a record of that God had spoken directly to a person in 10 generations. Not since Noah. And what does God tell Abram? Not what he wanted to hear. God says Leave. Leave Abram. Leave the place you live, leave the people you know, leave your family behind, and go. God asks Abram to leave the settled world, which he understands and in which he grew up, and go to another, a different place. Which place? God doesn't say.

What did God give Abram? Not really anything. If the physical is the focus. It seems as if God has only taken things from him. His comfort, his home, his people, his security, his life as he knew it.

However, Abram goes. Abram goes because God has given him something: God has given him a promise. While God may have brought his life thus far, he gives him something for his life to come, too. God promises him this: Abram, I will make you into a father of nations, even though you are

childless. Abram, I will give you this land, even though it is inhabited by Canaanites that far outnumber you. Abram, I will bless you, and I will make your name great, even though you are just another person living in Haran. Abram, you will be a blessing to all people. God gave Abram what can never be taken away, and that's his promise.

Even though Abram seems to have had everything taken from him, what's his response? ***"There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD."*** Even though Abram has lost his family, his culture, his home, his security, even though the reality of these promises seemed to be too crazy ever to come true, Abram builds not one but two altars to give thanks to the Lord. He gives thanks for the promise. He has the confidence that God's promise will come true.

And all of us know that all of those promises that God gave to Abram came true. He did possess that foreign land that he had never been to before. A childless elderly man did have a son. Those people who blessed him were blessed, and those who cursed him were cursed.

God gives to each one of us promises that seem too crazy ever to come true, even when it appears that he has given us nothing else. He gives you the promise that even though it may seem that there is no way you can afford to support your family, he will provide for you like the lilies so richly dressed in splendor. He promises that, even though your world is changing dramatically, he will be right alongside you through the rough waters. He promises you, even though you are lost and have nowhere to go, he has plans for you and a purpose that you will one day realize.

But the most important promise he gives to us is about that promise he gave to Abraham, the promise of the Savior. When God promised that all people on earth will be blessed through you, he meant it. That promise came true for Abram, and it came true for you. That promise of Jesus Christ is more valuable, more worthy of thanks than any of the other promises that God gives to you. Because that promise of Jesus makes our lives what they are. That promise fulfilled by Jesus means sins forgiven for your whole life. That promise fulfilled by Jesus means purpose behind everything that we experience. That promise fulfilled by Jesus means that when our lives are over, we have an eternity to sing more songs of thanksgiving in bliss.

Even though you lose all of your wealth, the bank can never take that promise from you. Even though you deal with steadily declining mental health, your own mind cannot take that promise from you. Even though you feel attacked on every side, Satan and the gates of hell themselves cannot take that promise from you.

So on this Thanksgiving, even though it seems that God hasn't given us much, we can still give thanks just like Abram. Not thanks just for what he's given in gifts and physical blessings, but thanks for what he's given in promises. Those promises that he gave to Abram, those promises that he fulfilled in Christ, those promises that he gives to you for your future. Amen.