

Sermon: *You are God's Plan In Christ*  
Text: Genesis 12:1-3; Ephesians 1:3-10  
Preacher: Rev. Tom Cramer  
Date: October 11, 2009

I. [Slide #1]

This is now the fourth sermon in a series called “God’s Story and Our Story.” If you’ve been with us the past few weeks, you’ve been learning about the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of sin. Pastor Jeff didn’t use those terms, partly because people don’t like to talk about “doctrines” any more, but theologically, that’s what we’ve been grappling with.

In the doctrine of creation, we discover how God’s story starts out SO good. He makes this amazing universe with all of its diversity and beauty and wonder, and then, as the crowning moment in creation, God makes you and me, humankind, and he calls them “very good.”

You know, there are two proofs of God’s love for us. The first proof is that God made us and created us with amazing potential to love and be loved, to experience beauty and wonder and community. The fact that you exist, according to scripture, is proof that you were made by a God who sang a song when he made you, and you are beloved. That’s the doctrine of creation.

But today, we’re going to discover the second proof that God loves us, that when we make mistakes, and we begin to do harm to ourselves and others, and do things that are toxic and dangerous to ourselves and others, then God is still able to find us and love us. That’s the doctrine of redemption. And today, we’re going to see how God takes this world that’s so filled with pain and suffering, and learn about the beginnings of his plan to make things right.

Let’s pray together as we begin. Loving God, teach us from scripture today. Open our eyes to see how you are at work in history and in each of our lives to heal your creation. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

II. [Slide #2]

Last Sunday, Pastor Jeff listed for us the types of suffering that came from our first parent’s broken relationship with God. We hide, we are ashamed, we live in fear rather than in faith, we abuse the stewardship authority that has been given to us. The same is true when we hurt *each other*. We begin to feel “less than” and powerless, and try to hide from the other person who has done us harm. Or, we do just the opposite, and plot to hurt them back, just like they did to us.

Think about the hurts in your life. The man or woman you married ran away with someone else. Your business partner was cooking the books and embezzled thousands of dollars from your company. Or maybe you’re a student and you’ve been bullied, gossiped about, or somehow mistreated by the other kids in your school. You’ve discovered that there is a pecking order in society, and you’re on its lowest rung.

We’re relational beings and the deepest hurts in our lives come from our relationships. They are what hurt us the most. It should not surprise us, then, to discover that God’s uses relationships and community to heal what’s gone wrong in his creation.

III.

In the animated movie *Ice Age*, when saber-tooth tigers attack a tribe of nomads, a mother and her baby attempt to outrun the man-eating beasts but are cornered at a raging waterfall. With no other option available, the mother jumps off the edge, securely cradling her baby. She is mortally injured in the fall—just like most Disney movies—but survives long enough to place her newborn baby on the riverbank.

The little boy is then discovered by a woolly mammoth named Manfred, a sloth name Sid, and a saber-tooth tiger named Diego. These three unlikely companions unite on a common mission to return the baby to his father.

As the trio treks through a mountainous terrain of ice and snow carrying the baby, at one point the mammoth, sloth, and tiger realize they're on an erupting volcano. The heat of the lava melts the glacier bridges atop the ice fields, separating Diego from the others. Isolated on a quickly melting island of ice, Diego jumps to reach his friends, but falls short. Dangling from the edge of the ice field, his grip falters, and he falls. Manfred, unwilling to let Diego perish, leaps into a chasm after him and tosses the tiger upwards to safety. Diego, realizing the danger involved in the rescue, is moved by Manfred's compassion, courage, and sacrifice.

"Why did you do that?" he asks. "You could have died trying to save me."

Humbly, the mammoth responds, "That's what you do when you're part of a herd. You look after each other."

Amazed at the convergence of circumstances that has brought these three together, Sid muses aloud. "I don't know about you guys, but we are one strange herd."

#### IV. [Slide #3]

The same could be said about Abram and his family that we read about this morning. They are a strange herd. God only knows why God chose them. Abram is not a Jew; he's not even a Hebrew. He's a Mesopotamian semi-nomad. He starts his life with God in Babylonian Ur, hearing the call from a God whom he names *El Shaddai*. He doesn't even know the name of the Hebrew God yet. And yet, it is through his family that God plans to redeem the world.

Five times in three verses, God declares his choice to "bless" Abram and all the families of the earth through him. When God says to Abram, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed," God tips his hand at how he is going to redeem creation. God's solution for making this messed up world right is to use a family that blesses another family that turns into thousands and thousands of families like yours and like mine.

You might be tempted to think that God would come crashing through the roof or wave a magic wand to restore what had gone wrong, but God has a different plan in mind. The anecdote to the poison of sin and broken relationships is a "blessing community."

#### V.

If so many of the hurts in our lives come from relationships, it makes sense that God, who exists in loving relationships as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, would use a community to heal his creation.

I like the metaphor William Young uses in his best selling novel, *The Shack*, to speak of each person's need for community and love. He says that people are like birds whose wings have been clipped by the layers of losses, and hurts and disappointments we have experienced through life. He writes that "pain has a way of clipping our wings and keeping us from being able to fly. Left unresolved for very long, a person can almost forget that they were created to fly in the first place."

Leslie Newbigin, that great bishop of India, said, "The God of Scripture doesn't come through the roof to save you, he comes as your neighbor who knocks on your door." God uses people like you and like me who gather around his name to knock on people's doors and show them they are loved.

#### VI. [Slide #4]

In our culture where we have "neighborhood watch" and the "stranger" is considered evil before we meet him, knocking on a person's door is nearly a breach of privacy, so we are challenged to find other ways of blessing them.

I think of Terry Cocking who takes a group of members of this church into our county's prisons every month. His team would be the first to tell you that what they do isn't anything very sophisticated, but for the prisoners who have been locked away, to have a group of men come and pray for them month after month and do Bible studies with them through the mail, it makes all the difference in the world. They were created for love too!

Or take Helen Troy and DeEtte Sprimont who led our Cancer Crushers walk this past weekend. Or Judy Bath who valiantly set aside her walker and walked the "Survivors Lap" held up by a friend supporting her under each arm. If you were someone who is stricken with cancer and don't know how you're going to make it through your chemotherapy or radiation or whatever other difficult treatment you're facing, wouldn't it be helpful to talk to a survivor like Judy or DeEtte or Bill Levegood? My guess is that you would throw open the door when they come-a-knocking.

Or maybe you don't even have a door, but just a curtain you hang between two cardboard walls that you've leaned together. And here comes a group of men from Geneva who says they are going to build you a house with real walls and real doors, and they are even going to give you a lock and a key when they are all done. That's what 15 men from our church are doing this weekend in a shanty town outside of Tijuana. They've been down there since Friday morning and today they are finishing up the stucco and handing over the keys to a family that never had a door.

God uses a community like ours to redeem his world one blessing at a time.

#### VII.

If you're worried about whether or not you're worthy to be part of Abram's extended family, let me tell you that God has done everything he needs in order to invite you in. The adoption papers have been signed by Christ's blood on the cross. Ephesians 1:5 puts it this way: "God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ," and it goes on to say this in verse 7, "In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." The New Testament tells the story of Abram's offspring doing what Israel failed to do and thus fulfill God's plan to bless all the families of the earth. This happens through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God wants you to put your weight down on his faithfulness and enter into his family so that you might not only "hear that you were made to fly" but so that you can teach others to fly as well.

If you've been on the fence of doing something in this church besides coming to worship and leaving, let me invite you to take a step today. It might be a simple step like coming to Big Wednesday and taking part in the Pastor's Sermon Study. It's in these smaller groups in a church that we learn how to love one another and shape each other in the love of Christ. You never know how one conversation can lead to another if you're available to God. God can use you if you want to be a blessing. As you hear other people's stories in these groups, you might just get an idea of how God wants you to serve.

Or maybe you already sense God's nudge to a specific ministry with which you want to be involved. Perhaps it's a Feet-Out-The-Door ministry like those I've already mentioned, or maybe it's a ministry to the children or the homebound of this church. Pick up the phone and call a staff person to become part of this blessing community. That's what you're designed for.

If you, on the other hand, are a person who's "get up and go" has "gotten up and left," you can support these ministries through prayer and your financial giving. You're part of the blessing community too. Call Pastor Carolyn and get on our church's prayer team that intercedes for the people who need your prayers.

According to Genesis 12, YOU—and I—together are the one God has been waiting for! Don't miss the blessing he has for you. We need each other, and the world needs us as well. That has been God's plan for redemption all along. Amen.