

**Old Testament lesson: Genesis 11:31-12:4**

**New Testament lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

“The family in America is in crisis. The American family is at risk. Don’t believe me? ... Then listen ... to one of America’s leading political philosophers ..., Jean Bethke Elshtain, (who served as) the ... professor of Ethics at the University of Chicago.

In her ... book “Democracy on Trial,” she explores ... why, just when democracy is triumphing around the world, our American democracy is in such trouble. Her conclusion?

If democratic society is to be sustained in the future..., it requires strong families, much stronger families than we have seen in this country for more than a generation.”<sup>1</sup>

What you just heard me say was written 21 years ago. Did you catch that? An entire new generation has arisen and gone since Jean Elshtain warned about the collapse of American democracy. Do you think she got it right? That her prediction is still valid? Some say yes. Others say, no, democracy is finally making a comeback. Time will tell.

Time will tell, and yet this isn’t a sermon about democracy. This is a sermon about generations, generations of people growing up with hopes and dreams. Some come true, and some get dashed, trampled upon by an unforgiving world.

In our Old Testament reading, Abram – long before God made him the father of many nations and gave him the name Abraham – Abram had hopes and dreams. Abram’s hopes and dreams are generational – they are not going to be realized in one lifetime. Genesis tells us that Abram’s hopes and dreams began with his father, Terah, who took the family from their home in us and headed out for the land of Canaan, about 1,000 miles away. And these are foot mile – no planes, trains and automobiles.

They made it, 600 miles and then stopped, settling in the city of Haran. They lived there until Abram’s father died of old age, never reaching Canaan. Clearly, this journey to the promised land is not going to be quick and easy.

At Haran, years go by and then the Lord speaks to Abram, saying, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” Oh, boy, here we go again. Another wilderness trip for Abram. He and his wife leave the security of their home and head out for the land of Canaan.

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Kaylor, Senior Writer, HomileticsOnline, referencing Jean Bethke Elshtain, Democracy on Trial, New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

Let's stop right there for a moment. Abram is 75 years old at this point. Canaan is another 400 miles away, on foot. Why bother, why risk it? Can't you see the townspeople asking him that? And his only answer? Because God told me to; God said he would make of me a great nation, says Abram, a great name; that I would be a blessing to all humanity.

Don't you think people wondered if Abram was doing the right thing? –Pegging his hopes and dreams on such an uncertain future.

This is a sermon about generations of people growing up with hopes and dreams. We all have hopes and dreams. The young people here today are hoping to make something of themselves in this world. Those who have gone before – their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents – they are hoping they've done enough, hoping they've paved the way for the next generation. And in this day and age, we are all hoping America can do the right thing to ensure a bright future for generations to come, if not also for us, in the days to come.

Just as uncertain as it was for Abram that he would make it to Canaan, it seems uncertain today for many people today that our country will continue to prosper. We hope it will. We can even envision it, under these or other circumstances – our hopes and dreams coming true.

And really, in the end, don't we all have the same hopes and dreams in America – the safety and prosperity of our families and the health and vitality of our country. How we get there is yet to be revealed. But as Americans, we all share in those hopes and dreams.

And as people of faith, we have an assurance from God that we will make it. God assures us that if we keep moving forward in faith, we too will reach the promised land, both as a nation and as individuals. It doesn't matter if you're feeling stuck right now.

Look at Abram! He was stuck halfway at Haran on his journey to the promised land, and still, he kept the faith. It doesn't matter if you feel like you're headed in the wrong direction. Abram was sent by God (quote), "... to the land that I will show you." He didn't have a road map or a clear picture of his destination or how he would get there. But by keeping the faith, he was shown the way forward, step by step. It doesn't matter if you think you're too old to keep moving forward. Abram was 75 when he headed off to Canaan. He was 86 when he had his first child, 99 when he finally settled in Canaan – 24 years later – and he was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born. And at a certain point along the way, the Lord changed his name from Abram to Abraham, from "exalted father" (Abram) to "the father of nations" (Abraham).

Likewise, if we keep the faith and move forward as guided by God, God will bring us safely to the promises that await us. And even more, God will use us to bless the lives of those around us.

God uses God's people to bless the lives of others. That is the promise, in faith, that God made to Abraham, our spiritual ancestor. And that is the promise, in Christ, that God makes to us, down through the generations. We see this generational blessing of God throughout Genesis. At each major event or crisis in Abram's life, God reminds him of the promise.

In Genesis 12, which we heard read today, God holds out promise for Abram, Also, in Genesis 13 and Genesis 15, the same promise is reiterated. And then generations later, God holds out the same promise, to Isaac in Genesis 22, and to Isaac's son Jacob in Genesis 28 and Genesis 32 and Genesis 35.

Abram's hopes and dreams are generational – they are not going to be realized in one lifetime. But they are realized. The fact that you and I know anything about Abram is a testament to God's faithfulness. Abram was faithful to God and God was faithful to Abram, and nothing that happened or could ever happen can change that.

It's the same for us. When we are faithful to God, God is faithful to us. The thing to remember is that, while we tend to measure progress one generation at a time, God is multi-generational. And that is part of the God's grace, which we all enjoy. We don't have to worry that a single generation may not get it right. God is working across the generations.

And the best way for us to be instrumental in the fulfillment of God's promise – God's plan for humanity – is for us also to work across the generations. That's why the church is so important to the health of our society. With the fracture of the American family unit – with everyone living their own lives and going in their own directions – the church is the one place where all the generations meet – moms and dads, children and grandchildren, aunts and uncles and grandparents, yours, mine and ours – all together to learn about and share in the love and guidance and promise of God.

Thank God for your presence here today. Thank God for your legacy of faith, lived out for across the generations. Thank God for what you are doing – and seeking to do – to be faithful to the promise of God, the plans that God has for you, and for your life, and for all the generations to come. Amen.

## **Pastoral Prayer**

Loving God, our patient Creator, walk with us this Lent and help us see our desire to be known, praised, admired for what it is.

Help us see how we have bought into believing that our worth comes from what we do and how we are noticed.

Remind us that faithfulness is often hidden, humble and simple.

Give us a generous dose of self-confidence mixed with humility.

And when we get confused and out of balance, bring us home to our true selves and set our eyes upon Jesus, our companion and guide.

We do look to Jesus, to heal us, to comfort us, to strengthen us. We pray the Lord's mercy upon those in need, and especially for those we lift up in our hearts in this moment of silence.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive  
our debtors;  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,  
For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.**