



**MYERS PARK
BAPTIST
CHURCH**

**A faith community
on a journey seeking
a welcoming, loving,
and just world.**

“A PRIVILEGE OR A RESPONSIBILITY?”

**Sermon delivered by Dr Reverend Tim Moore
Genesis 12:1-9 on June 7, 2026
Second Sunday after Pentecost**

When Martin Luther King was a young child, one of his favorite playmates was a white boy whose parents owned a grocery store in his segregated, Black neighborhood. However, when he was 6 years old, his friend’s parents would no longer let the two boys play together. It was King’s first painful experience of racism.

He wrote about the experience for the first time as part of a class assignment at Crozer Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Later, he used the story several times in sermons, speeches, and lectures. It was one of the stories that drove him as a person, and as a preacher.

For the past seven years King biographers, Lerone Martin and Jonathan Eig, have been searching for this white playmate. Last week in the New York Times the researchers confessed they’ve been unable to verify King’s story. That doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. I won’t bore you with the details, you can read it online yourself. This occurred over 90 years ago and historical data about Black neighborhoods wasn’t carefully kept in the Jim Crow era of the US American South. Their frustrating search caused the biographers to ask an important question: **What if King misremembered the details of this early childhood memory? Does it matter?** After all, it’s the remembering of the story that stuck with him, not the actual event.

We all have stories that greatly influence how we see or understand ourselves, or collectively how we view this church, or our faith, or life in this society. Stories like King’s childhood memory, which seared the pain of racism into his psyche, became a compass which he used to map the direction of his life. Each of us have stories like that, driving us, directing us, many times unconsciously and unquestioned, but nevertheless relentlessly.

Dick Hester, a friend to me and many of you, in his book, *Know Your Story and Lead with It*, wrote, **“We select, reject, connect, pare, smooth out, lengthen this, compress that, and tidy up a messy conglomeration of information to create a story of what happened. . . .** This gap between what actually took place and what people can tell of it is the space where a narrative approach does its primary work. Much like a movie editor trying to find essential pieces of film for a scene, a curious person can go to that heap of neglected information on the cutting room floor and find other narratives—stories that may reinforce or challenge the one that’s been told” [Hester, p 11].

Long quote, I know, look up the manuscript on the website in a few days if you missed some of that. **What Dick is saying is that in every experience of life we create shortened stories of what happens, which can never be exactly what happened,** and the stories we create say as much about us and how we edit them as much as they say what happened.

Today, and the next three weeks we will explore four key stories in the Book of Genesis in order to tap into stories within ourselves and collectively about this church. And for what it's worth these are the Hebrew Bible lectionary readings, so if you talk to your Methodist, Presbyterian, or Episcopalian friends this week, maybe their preachers talked about the same story and you can compare.

The story of Abraham's covenant is told four times in the Book of Genesis. We'll return to another version of the story later this month. All four revolve around the idea that God made a covenant with Abraham giving him the land on which he stood and to his descendants.

Today's passage is probably the earliest; it's the cleanest and simplest. **"The LORD says to Abraham, 'Go from your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.'"** God asks Abraham and Sarah to leave all that they know. When they leave their families, their home, they are heading to an unknown future, and they will never be coming back.

The journey is also a symbol for faith. Joseph Campbell wrote multiple books on the mythology of a journey story. To follow God, this unseen being, this belief that we cannot prove, is to leave all that you can know and prove and chart and to guide your life towards the mysteries of our existence. As Abraham and Sarah hunted for the land they thought God was showing them, so we try to live our lives in the way we think God is showing us. This church grabs hold of this idea in its vision statement: **Myers Park Baptist Church is a faith community on a journey seeking a welcoming, loving, just world.**

For Abraham and Sarah their journey offered them a gift of God's blessing. God says, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." **This blessing is almost comical.** They have traveled hundreds of miles on foot; they are strangers in a strange land. **They do not have a great name; nobody, I mean nobody, knows their names. They are not a great nation; they are an older couple who have no children.** The only relative mentioned on the journey is a nephew, named Lot, because they have no children of their own. But this is not the biggest punchline of the blessing.

God is blessing Abraham and Sarah so that they will be a blessing to others. This older couple who have no children and no one knows their names have been blessed by God to be a blessing to others. In fact, all the families of the earth shall be blessed through them. That's the blessing. And this is the first story about Abraham and Sarah in the Hebrew scriptures, this blessing. Abraham and Sarah are the parents, or you could say the grandparents—more on that in a couple of weeks—of the Jewish people, meaning that the Jewish story begins with a blessing. And since Christianity is a faith child of Judaism, the Christian story also begins with a blessing. Which should have us asking what does it mean to be blessed?

The Hebrew word for blessing—*berekh*—also means praise. To bless is to praise and to praise is to bless [Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, p 20]. When thinking about your life, can you remember the persons who have blessed you? **Do you remember stories when someone fully affirmed who you are?** Maybe it was a teacher that saw your potential before you even saw it in yourself? And that belief in you changed your life! Maybe it was a trusted friend or family member that fully embraced you when you came out to them? And what had been a moment of vulnerability, maybe even fear, became a moment of complete love and affirmation. And you knew without a shadow of doubt you were loved exactly as you are.

Do you remember stories when someone praised you for something you did or somehow you are and it caught you by surprise because you had never thought much of that, but their praise lifted you up so much that it changed the way you saw yourself? What are your stories of blessing?

King's story was a painful memory for him but it was also a story of blessing, because when his parents had to tell him he could no longer play with his friend and when they told him why, about the racism in our country, he distinctly remembered his mother never-the-less reassuring him, "You're as good anyone." **Dr. King would later say that his mother's response to his childhood pain gave him a sense of "somebody-ness."**

What's your story of "somebody-ness"? Your story of blessing?

I've been rereading this book [*By a Dream Possessed*] that was given to me decades ago—this church's history. And there are so many stories of the way this church is blessed—blessed by God, and blessed by its congregants, blessed by its wealth, and blessed by its fearlessness. But I'm curious, what are the stories of blessing you remember about this church? In our remembering about this church and about ourselves, the stories we remember tell us something about ourselves. And what becomes important is not really what actually happened, but how and why we choose to remember it the way we do.

MLK could have remembered the story of his lost playmate as a reminder of how terrible the world can be and how he should be bitter and resentful about it. Instead, because of his mother's reassurance, it reminded him of his "somebody-ness," and the story also made him dedicated to change this society and free Blacks and whites and all persons of the pain of racism.

Like Abraham, he had been blessed to be a blessing for others. And you too! And you, and you, and you, and me! We have been blessed to be a blessing for others. God's blessing is a responsibility, not a privilege.

Now, this may sound odd to you. Because we are increasingly living in a society where people who have been blessed through our capitalistic system with great wealth, or exceptional education and knowledge, or with substantial power, think this entitles them to more privilege. That they don't owe anyone anything of what they possess in worldly goods, or knowledge of the mind, or in the power they exert. If Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos doesn't hardly pay any taxes, or if Warren Buffet pays a lower rate of taxes than his secretary does, then why should the rest of us pay so much. This corrosive attitude makes us more of a me, me, me world, instead of a we world. Football stadiums and basketball arenas are torn down and replaced with more luxury boxes for the rich and less seats for everybody else. Airlines can now make more profit with a small number of First Class, lay-flat seats, than they can with a couple hundred squeezed in economy seats. Retailers are shifting their approaches to serving the needs of their wealthiest customers over the needs of all their customers.

More and more people are thinking: **What can my wealth, or my expertise, or my connections get me?** I wonder, what are the stories that inform such people?

Phyllis Trible, the great feminist biblical scholar, said there is a great flaw in this blessing God bestows upon Abraham. Sarah is barren. There can be no great nation with no children; there can be no great name with no children. The blessing is granted none-the-less.

And here's the truth, all of us are barren in some way, at some time, but that doesn't stop God, or some teacher, or some friend, or some loved one to bless us none-the-less. And something unseen is spoken into existence. Sometimes the blessing is the seed, once planted that grows in us in exponential ways.

And once blessed, how can we not share our abundance? How should this church share its blessing, its abundance? May God find us faithful. So be it. AMEN.