

Genesis 12:1-12 The Promise and the Miracle
Matthew 9:18-26
June 7, 2026

Among the beloved features of the Christian heritage involves the stories about Jesus, as described in the gospels of the New Testament, and other stories throughout the Bible. Sunday after Sunday, biblical stories are re-told, either in Sunday School classes, or scripture readings, or in the artwork and music and preaching of the church.

Time spent contemplating one of these stories is often enough to make one feel as if they have been to church. When I was a child, I did not know the significance of these stories. Of course, they are still memorable and engaging. More importantly, they are a part of an interpretation of life.

They teach us that the world's life, often characterized by confusion, disappointment and failure, is not, and does not have the final word, and is overshadowed by God's life; the source and substance of our faith. They teach us that, regardless of the events of the world's history, or our own histories, *we live our lives under the umbrella of God's grace.*

They teach us to believe in God's healing power, among other things, that forgiveness and reconciliation are real, and are grounded in the life of God, that meaning is found in a relationship with God. They teach us that God is, "directing our paths."

We have read two such stories today. The first story is from the first book in the Bible, speaks to this aspect of how God has been involved in the life of the world. We know it as the, "The Call of Abram." In it, Abram does not witness a miracle in the traditional sense. Rather, he senses a call directing him to leave home to another place.

For Abram, the issue was faith and obedience, in the context of a command. God called Abram and sent him to an unplanned life he did not control. The question asked of him is whether or not he would go.

The promise given to him could not possibly be kept in his lifetime. I think of the statement in The Letter to the Hebrews in the, "roll call of faith," where the author makes the following remarkable claim;

"All these people (Abraham in particular) were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; *they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.* And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth."

We are forever beset with the challenge of a faith that does not begin with a guarantee but with a promise, and whatever happens along the way may encourage and strengthen our faith, or sometimes it may test it, but does not stand as the promised destination.

It is striking that the last line for the Old Testament reading is that, "Abram set out and continued towards *the Negev,*" *the Negev,* of all places. *This* was to be

the Land of the Promise? The word itself means, “dry land,” and refers to a wilderness area in the south of Israel. It is where the Israelites spent part of their journey after the Exodus from Egypt. Before it was a call to a paradise, *it was a summons to a desert*. The promise is not only that Abram would become the father of a great nation, but that it be a blessing to the world.

The gospel story is from Matthew. It is two stories really, one sandwiched inside the beginning and the end of the other. They are about similar things; the healing of the sick, the raising of the dead.

It is a story is about a leader among the people who comes to Jesus with the tragic news of his daughter's death. He believes that all hope is not yet lost, for Jesus is not only known as a healer, but as someone who has power over life and death. *If he comes and just touches her, she may yet live*.

On the way, Jesus is delayed by a woman who has been subject to an illness involving blood for as long as the man's daughter has been alive. She believes that if she can simply touch the hem of his garment, *she too* can be healed.

There is a companion version in the The Gospel of Mark. In the fifth chapter there is a much longer and more detailed rendering of the same story. In Mark there are names, and there is more dramatic tension, because in Mark's version of the story the girl is not yet deceased.

It is in the delay that she dies and then her father tells Jesus that his services are no longer required. Jesus doesn't listen. In Matthew, this man is presented as being willing to believe that death is not final.

Either way, the woman is healed and the child is raised. After the mourners and guests had laughed at him, he took the young girl by the hand and she got up, and the news of these events spread all around.

Some in the present age are suspicious of belief in this kind of healing. Medical science tells us that the body has its own healing powers that rise above even the power of science, which *has* found ways to help, to put the body in a better position to heal itself, even if the medicine is not the source of healing.

Most of us mix to the two ideas, believing in the power of God to heal the sick and raise the dead, and the ability of modern medicine to help. We pray, and then go to the doctor, and then pray some more. Believers continue to acknowledge God as the source of that healing and life-giving power.

The miracles of healing, and for that matter all the miracle stories, are given to us to speak of God's involvement in earthly life, always engaged with human beings in their humanity even when they are unaware or unwilling to acknowledge God's presence.

Each of us, as faithful followers of Christ on pilgrimage, is caught in the tension between the

promise and the miracle, between the desert and the oasis.

The promise compels a faithful response. The miracle encourages and strengthens the development of our faith, giving meaning and assurance to our lives at crucial times, sometimes when the journey is at its bleakest. Miracles may be thought of as a way of seeing the destination from a distance.

The Promise is eternal. Miracles have a temporary life-span. Their affect fades after awhile. The recipients of these powerful deeds did not live forever, neither one of them. Even Jesus in his bodily humanity left this world behind.

Religious life itself involves the belief in God's Incarnate Presence. Miracles, signs, wonders, whatever they are called, bear witness to that presence. It is at least part of the reason these stories that are left to us for the telling are so beloved and meaningful.

For the man in the gospel story, and the woman met along the way, life had become a wilderness journey, as it was for Abram in the Negev. *Jesus turned it into a paradise, an oasis where the living thrive.*

Those who have proclaimed the gospel message have always insisted that the world also has a way of interpreting life, one that is interested in self gain, indulgence, an arrogance that assumes the human

power to solve that problem of its own life. The facts of history betray the failure of the idea.

The story of Abram's call announces God's decision in favor of the world and all its people. The miracle bears witness to God's attention given to the details of daily living. The response of faith leads to gratitude, humility, joy, love, empathy and compassion, hope, and faith, as one hymnist put it, "for the living of these days."

The news is good. Pay attention.

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