

**Genesis 12:1-4 The Call of Abram**

**12** Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

**Psalm 67 The Nations Called to Praise God**

<sup>1</sup>May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,

<sup>2</sup>that your way may be known upon earth,  
your saving power among all nations.

<sup>3</sup>Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.

<sup>4</sup>Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth

<sup>5</sup>Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.

<sup>6</sup>The earth has yielded its increase;  
God, our God, has blessed us.

<sup>7</sup>May God continue to bless us;  
let all the ends of the earth revere him.

**John 3:16**

<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

John 3:16 is the Bible verse memorized by most Christian and a favored verse of many... “For God so loved the world that he gave...” It sounds delightful and we are filled with gratitude. It’s great but I want to challenge you this morning with this verse.

In most cases we assign the word “world” in this verse a picture of the “me” or the things that surround the “me” which are of familiarity, what we find in common, and what is within our own comprehension of what surrounds us; in other words, “For God so loved my world he gave”.

And isn’t it much easier to allocate God’s “giving” and showing of favor to oneself and to where one belongs? Now I’m not saying it’s not true that “God bless America!” (speaking with much appreciation and gratefulness as one who earned her citizenship as an immigrant to the U.S.) but what part of the world does not claim God’s blessing upon themselves? South Korean national anthem claims that “God protects and provides that our nation prospers”, and in research I found that the Canadian anthem says, “God keeps our land glorious and free”, and

the Mexican anthem includes the phrase “for your eternal destiny has been written in heaven by the finger of God” just to name a few.

In the Genesis text this morning, we read God’s promise to who we call, Father Abraham, the father of all nations that all would be blessed through him which brings this whole world, what we have seen and unseen, what we have heard of and unheard of, into one origin... Abraham; somehow making our big diverse and divided world so small, under 1 umbrella.

However, on the contrary, Psalm 67, which is classified as a communal song of thanksgiving, possibly associated with a harvest festival or as a prayer for God’s blessing of the Israelites, carries in it a universal perspective, celebrating God’s blessing for them as a nation while it also encourages all nations upon the earth to praise God who is the source of all blessings. The New Interpreter Bible’s commentary on this psalm suggests that “The community of God here learns how to break away from all narrowness in the reception of salvation.” This psalm calls all nations to praise God, opening the perspective of blessing, not upon, a small world, but the whole world, opening of the umbrella so to speak.

The commentary continues,” In our contemporary world, plagued by injustice and divided by extremes of poverty and wealth,” might we just add in our context all the isms...: racism, sexism, classism, ableism, anti-Semitism, ageism, heterosexism, “It is crucial that we hear the message of Psalm 67 that God rules the world and intends blessing for all the world’s people. This means that God wills justice for all including the equitable distribution of earth’s harvest.”

The last part about the earth’s harvest will be dealt with by Pastor Rich in next Sunday’s sermon on Creation as community, but today we remember the world as one community. As John 3:16 continues to bring us back to equal grounding, leveling all people on earth to have been given God’s most precious gift of Jesus, his suffering, death, and resurrection life without condition, and brings us into a relationship with one another worldwide, we have a special privilege for us today. As good United Methodists working out our faith through the quadrilateral, which is Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience, we will focus our attention today on validating and learning from the experience of the brothers and sisters within our church community. You have heard from Pastor Rich of his experience in the African community where he grew up and my experiences in the South Korean Community. I have asked a couple of people who have recently traveled to another part of the world where not many have gone to share their experience of community away from home with us. I pray that as we listen to their experiences, we will be inspired to deepen our faith and relationships, widen our understanding of others and ultimately God.

(Presentation by Kathleen Dytrych and Robbin and Rolland Lang)

Thank you so much for sharing your heart and experiences with us. I encourage you to approach them, as I know that they would love to tell you more about their experiences in their travel as they were given such a short-limited time to share just one aspect of their travel.

I also encourage you to think about what you have learned in encountering those from other communities around the world and reflect on what you find as common in their communities and what differences are worth learning and emulating into your own communities and faith journeys.

As we are singing hymns pertaining to the theme of the world as community today, let us learn about them, as we are using them as our prayers and as words of praise to God with all our hearts, minds, and strength.

“In Christ there is no east or west” which we sang first was written by John Oxenham, one of the pen names for businessman William J Dunkerly who lived from 1852 to 1941. He traveled extensively throughout Europe, United States, and South America and lived in France for several years and discovered his liking of writing better than business as he wrote to relieve tedium of long journey. The words of this hymn was originally a poem included as part of a libretto called, “Darkness and Light” prepared in 1908 for an exhibition for the London Missionary Society on the theme, “The Orient in London.”

The hymn “Help us Accept each other” was written by Fred Kaan a native of Haarlem, Netherlands, who was ordained in the United Reformed Church, one of the 4 great English language hymn writers during 1960 and 1970s. His life story includes living through the Nazi occupation, saw three of his grandparents die of starvation, and witnessed his parents’ deep involvement in the resistance movement and taking in a number of refugees. This hymn is known to be one of the most powerful hymns on reconciliation and forgiveness composed in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The closing hymn and a favorite of many here today, “Let there be peace on earth” came together in 1955 with melody written by Sy Miller and lyrics written by his wife Jill Jackson Miller. In an interview Jill talked about her background and the context of this song. “When I attempted suicide in 1944 and I didn’t succeed, I knew for the first time the unconditional love which God is. You are totally loved, totally accepted, just the way you are. In that moment I was not allowed to die, and something happened to me, which is very difficult to explain. I had an eternal moment of truth, in which I knew I was loved, and I knew I was here for a purpose. This hymn was introduced at a California retreat to a group of young people who were from a wide variety of religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The young people had come together for a weeklong experience devoted to developing friendship and understanding through education, discussion, and working together. And this song’s focus on peace and God made it easy to cross many boundaries.

Sy Miller wrote about the effect of the song: “One summer evening in 1955, a group of 180 teenagers of all races and religions, meeting at a workshop high in the California mountains locked arms, formed a circle and sang a song of peace. They felt that singing the song, with its

simple basic sentiment—‘Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me’—helped to create a climate for world peace and understanding.

Benediction:

May the God we serve pour grace and blessing into our lives!  
 May the face of God shine light upon us!  
 May we celebrate God’s love and justice in such a way  
 that everyone around will come to know God,  
 and will experience God’s grace and blessing for themselves.  
 God the father, the Jesus the Son, and Holy Spirit go with you!

*Robbin and Rolland Lang’s presentation*

*Q1. When, where, with whom did you travel to another part of the world?*

Ans: In January & February this year we traveled to Australia and 3 other countries in southeast Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

*Q2. How did you experience community with those you came in contact with in that part of the world?*

Ans: One of the goals of our trip was to visit former AFS exchange students who had lived in northern Illinois and whom we had known when they lived here. We were able to spend time with 19 of them, in many cases living with them for several days.

This first slide shows a young woman named Oom and her family. Oom was a student in Batavia in 2005-06 and lived with good friends of ours. When she learned we were coming to Indonesia, she strongly encouraged us to get off the beaten track, spend a few days with her family, and visit the school where she teaches in a rural village called Brebes, about 4 hours by train east of Jakarta.

We accepted the invitation and discovered that Brebes is all about community. The second slide shows a typical neighborhood street and Friday morning market. As you can see, neighbors live close together and know each other well. Multiple generations live in close proximity, and family friends are often referred to as “uncles, aunts, and cousins” even when not biologically related. The third slide shows tea time and the local grade school celebrating our visit. When you arrive as a foreign visitor, everyone wants to meet you and have you over for tea. When you stay overnight, children will come to the house and peek inside to see what the visitors look like – and everyone wants to take a picture with you! And don’t even think of paying for food, gas, or entertainment. They really know how to “welcome the stranger!”

*Q3. What did you find in common which comforted you away from your “home community?” What did you experience as different that inspired you and that you might try to incorporate into your community and faith.*

Ans: Whether you’re traveling or at home, you can’t escape the fact that living involves daily routines: sharing meals, doing shopping and chores, planning how to spend family time, etc. Our time with Oom, Faiq, Haidar, and little Mufia involved all of that, just like we would have been doing had we been at home. And in a day or so those shy, adorable children who

couldn't understand a word we said began to drop games in our lap and invite us to play. That's when we really began to feel "at home."

What might we incorporate into our community and faith? We loved the closeness of community in the village of Brebes, which we certainly can try to create or improve in our own neighborhoods. When it comes to faith, as you may know, Indonesia is a predominantly Muslim country, and we were very impressed by the devotion to DAILY religious practice by Indonesians. Among the so-called "pillars" of Islam is the duty to pause for prayer 5 times every day: Before sunrise, shortly after noon, later in the afternoon, just after sunset, and before retiring for the night. Praise is given to God in each prayer time, his guidance is sought, and time is devoted to remembering the meaning of one's life. Seeing Oom and Faiq faithfully observe this duty, we realized that we could definitely benefit from putting prayer higher on our list of daily practices.

*Presentation by Kathleen Dytrych*

Here are the questions I am hoping to get answered from you.

*Q1) When, where and with whom did you travel to another part of the world?*

Last July I traveled to Mongolia with a group of three friends, one of those friends is from Canada and her friend joined us. My friends found this tour group called wild women excursions and they go to various amazing places throughout the world and plan small tours for women. Our tour group consisted of five women from the United States and five women from Canada. We had a lovely young woman as our tour guide from Mongolia who stayed with us the whole time and communicated for us. We had three men who were our van drivers, two vans full of people and one van full of all the equipment, sleeping bags, etc., and one female who was our cook who prepared lunch for us on the road and sometimes breakfasts. We stayed at ger, or yurt camps, and we typically ate at a restaurant for dinner and sometimes breakfast.

*Q2) How did you experience community with those you came in contact with in that part of the world?*

Without knowing the language, which was difficult to learn as they have a different alphabet than us, we really had to rely on others to help communicate for us, and to trust others to help us get to places and be safe. Before we met up with our tour group, our hotel concierge suggested we have a taxi driver take us to various sites in Ulanbataar, the big city, throughout the day. For only \$10 an hour the wonderful kind old gentlemen taxi driver drove us to various sites, temples, monuments, the black market, and stayed with us the whole time waiting for us to be done and take us to the next place. At the Black market, even knowing we could not communicate with him, he helped us by walking around with us, making sure we were safe. He helped us communicate with the merchants, asking questions, figuring out prices and making our purchases. You could tell that he felt responsible to ensure our safety and ensure that we had an enjoyable experience all throughout the day. We were so grateful to spend time with this man who cared for our group of young women tourists showing us his city, and to the hotel clerk who recommended him.

When we met up with our tour group we had the opportunity for nine days to get to know women from Canada. Although we spoke the same language, we come from slightly different

cultures so it was great to get to know and care about them and learn about their country. And more so, for all of us from Canada and United States, we got to know very well our amazing tour guide, protective van drivers, and the caring pregnant woman who was our cook. They took such good care of us all week and even though only the tour guide knew English, we got to know the van drivers and the Cook so well. We were able to communicate with each other through a few words, facial expressions, gestures and we all were still able to laugh with each other. We culminated the week with a goodbye bonfire with food and music and we danced and we all were in a circle with our arms around each other, and sang Let It Be together. They knew the words. It was so amazing. We had lots of hugs and were grateful for how they shared their country with us, took care of us, protected us, and ensured we had good time.

We also had the chance to do a home stay with a family on the Mongolian steppes staying in a ger, what we call a yurt. There was no electricity, no plumbing, no refrigeration, no bathrooms and we lived observing their lifestyle, observing their hospitality, and sharing a traditional Mongolian barbecue that the host family, husband and wife, prepared for us.

The community part is that no matter where people are, there are people that care about others, that want to help, that want to be friendly, that want to offer hospitality, that want to meet others and learn from others and to show love. It's an absolutely beautiful thing and one of the reasons why I love traveling so much, especially not just doing touristy things but meeting the people and experiencing the culture. I love experiencing other places on earth where there are so many differences, but with the commonality that we were all created by God and we are all his children.

*Q3) What you found in common which comforted to you away from your "home community" and what you experienced as different to which that inspired you and/or would try to incorporate into your community/faith community?*

Commonality, the mutual human desires for love, compassion, friendship, kindness and decency. We all have so many similarities. We love to laugh, smile, and communicate the best we can.

What was different, is what can be found different in so many other countries than ours: a slower pace of life, with effort made to have time to enjoy life and others, people enjoying the presence of others. In a recent trip to Europe, and in Mongolia, I rarely saw people constantly on their cell phones on public transportation or throughout the community. There is a slower pace in restaurants, not impatient customers wanting everything quick. Slower pace, and living more in the moment. And as I saw in a recent Europe trip, and my trip to Mongolia, people are not so wasteful. In Mongolia they use everything. Pringles cans were used to hold spices and salt and sugar, every part of the animal is used. I was holding a baby lamb and a horn with the nipple on the bottom was used as a bottle for the hurt lamb. Glass is used, not plastic, no straws, and rarely plastic bags. I think there is a greater concern for conservation. Or in Mongolia, a poorer country, it's necessity.

What inspires me is love and compassion and the beauty of people from all different cultures created by God. What do I want to incorporate in all my life? Slowing down, living in the moment, not having my mind preoccupied, not rushing, having more peace and calm.