

First Friends Church, a Quaker meeting
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett
Lot's Journey: It's Complicated
September 20, 2020
Genesis 12: 1-5a, 19:30-31, 37-38

Genesis 12: 1- 5a, 12: 1-5a, 19:30- 31, 37-38

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. 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. 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.' 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. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan.

Now Lot went up out of Zoar and settled in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; so he lived in a cave with his two daughters. The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day. The younger also bore a son and named him Ben-ammi; he is the ancestor the Ammonites to this day.

Message

We only heard the “bookends” of Lot's journey. At one end he left Haran with Abram and Sarai and they headed for Canaan. At the other end he had grandsons who became the ancestors of two peoples, cousins to Abram's progeny the Israelites (who battle for hundreds of years). One commentary summarized Lot's story as, “... the consequences of greed and the negative influence of a sinful environment... Lot knew God, but ... chose... sin and complacency. [It is]... an illustration of God's great mercy—in spite of Lot's poor choices, God... preserved his line throughout the ages.¹ But there's much more to Lot's journey- it's complicated- because he was human.

Why did Lot accompany Abram? Perhaps he was obedient to God like Abram or just a good nephew. Maybe he wanted to cash in on the blessings God offered Abram or was seeking a better life. Are those things incompatible? No! One complication of being human is two things can be true at the same time. Do you find most of your decisions are either/or, or both/and?

Perhaps it was just a coincidence but Abram, Sarai and Lot accumulated fortunes in Egypt. This is a good thing right? Well, remember God sent them to Canaan. How did they get so far off track? Perhaps that is why they started fighting over things and land when they left Egypt. Are there times when we get off track from Spirit's leading? Are we ever tempted to allow possessions, jobs, goals,

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Lot-in-the-Bible.html>

wants, or less important things to get in the way of what is truly important; our relationships, a simple life grounded in God, and sharing the blessings we have?

Lot may have intended to be a good nephew and Abram a good uncle. Abram played peacekeeper, appearing to take the high road saying, “Let’s not fight.” Lot did his best for his family- he picked the best land, or at least appeared to. Have your good intentions ever gone astray?

Both men made a human error in judgment that literally lasted forever. Instead of putting their relationship first, reconciling their differences, and learning how to share and engage in healthy ways, they decided to part ways. In a Quaker Life essay Noah Baker Merrill wrote, “... the spiritual principal [of idolatry] is about the harm that is caused to ourselves and others when we allow our profound attention, commitment, and reliance to rest on something that won’t endure- whatever form that may take.”²

Instead of sharing their bounty and future, Lot and Abram went their own ways. They lost their interconnectedness. What do you do if you feel temptations of hurt feelings, pride, hurt, super- independence, or self-centeredness? How do we know when it is worthwhile to work out differences and fight for a relationship? How do we grow beyond being peacekeepers to becoming peacemakers? How do we embrace interconnectedness with each other and God’s creation?

In his new land, Lot went from the pan of a clash with his family to the fire of a war of kings and imprisonment. Abram rushed in to rescue him. Have you ever had a family member, friend or stranger come to your rescue or vice versa; even if there was no request, no sense of dessert or recognition that it was needed? How do we live into forgiveness and forgetting to overcome a sense of owing or being owed, to live in simple care and compassion for the other?

Lot then settled in for a good life in wicked Sodom- and you have heard enough to know how that went. But before we go there, we need to check back in with Abram. There we get two clues about exactly what it is that is wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah.

First, Abram set an example of generous hospitality when two strangers who he doesn’t recognize as God’s representatives visited. Second, Abram got God to agree to stop the two angels from destroying the cities- if ten righteous men could be found- the number necessary to be a community! Put these two clues together and we see God will destroy the cities because they are not a community- community defined as a people who recognize and care for God found in the stranger in their midst. Do our “cities” recognize God in the way we treat people?

Like many of us, Lot lived in a city where the values did not match his values. Still, he knew and did what was right when he saw strangers with no place

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to stay- he invited them into his home. When his values were challenged by a mob attacking the angels/strangers Lot also knew and did what was right. He stood up for them.

But Lot is human and he only went part way in living his values. He was willing to protect the “valued” other, but he did not see all others as equally valuable. He offered his daughters in exchange for strangers- a loss certainly, but not the true sacrifice. He was not willing to offer himself. Do we see all others equally deserving of care and protection? What are we willing to sacrifice?

The fates of Sodom and Gomorrah were sealed, and in spite of his half-hearted goodness, the angels offered to save Lot and his family. Lot gave them all the information, but his son-in-laws didn't take the warning seriously. His wife left Sodom with him but she looked back, clinging to what she knew of the past and what she wanted to be true. They were human and they didn't make it. How hard it must have been and how conflicted human Lot must have felt with even his family questioning him and truth. Are there not many parallels to today?

Refugees from disaster, Lot and his daughters ended up living in a cave in the hills. Who could blame Lot for not feeling safe in a city after the way the people of Sodom treated him and after God destroyed the city? Where do refugees go for safety? How do you find safety for yourself and your family?

Lot intended to keep his daughters safe but he was short sighted and did not think of all their needs. In their isolation his daughters became so desperate they tricked Lot into giving them children. How do you relate to stories of desperation?

Lot's grandchildren were also his children. Still, something good came from the bad decisions his daughters made. Lot's grandchildren were the ancestors of the Ammonites and the Moabites who fought with and married Israelites. In turn they were ancestors of Ruth and Boaz who married and became the ancestors of Jesus of Nazareth. When you look at your life how has your life been changed by difficult, impossible or unimaginable situations?

One commentator said the two notable things in Lot's story are that he went with Abram, and his wife was turned into a pillar of salt. Why did the commentator ignore so many parts of the story? Lot's journey- it's complicated. But it is also human and there is much to learn from it. How do we pay attention to the whole, complicated, human, journey of our lives?