

**Series: Life!**

**Sermon: Watch where Your Lot is**

**Genesis 13:1-2, 5-18**

So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. <sup>2</sup> Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

<sup>5</sup> Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. <sup>6</sup> But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. <sup>7</sup> And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

<sup>8</sup> So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. <sup>9</sup> Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

<sup>10</sup> Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup> So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: <sup>12</sup> Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. <sup>13</sup> Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

<sup>14</sup> The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. <sup>15</sup> All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. <sup>16</sup> I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. <sup>17</sup> Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

<sup>18</sup> So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

**Sermon**

Meet Edwin Thomas, a master of the stage. During the latter half of the 1800s, this small man with the huge voice had few rivals. Debuting in Richard III at the age of 15, he quickly established himself as a premier Shakespearean actor. In New York he performed Hamlet for 100 consecutive nights. In London he won the approval of the tough British critics. When it came to tragedy on the stage, Edwin Thomas was in a select group.

When it came to tragedy in life, the same could be said as well. Edwin had two brothers, John and Junius. Both were actors, although neither rose to his stature. In 1863, the three siblings united their talents to perform Julius Caesar. The fact that Edwin's brother John took the role of Brutus was an eerie harbinger of what awaited the brothers—and the nation—two years later.

For this John who played the assassin in Julius Caesar is the same John who took the role of assassin in Ford's Theatre. On a crisp April night in 1865, he stole quietly into the rear of a box in the Washington theater and fired a bullet at the head of Abraham Lincoln. As you can guess, the last name of the brothers was Booth - Edwin Thomas Booth and John Wilkes Booth.

Edwin was never the same after that night. Shame from his brother's crime drove him into retirement. He might never have returned to the stage had it not been for a twist of fate at a New Jersey train station. Edwin was awaiting his coach when a well-dressed young man, pressed by the crowd, lost his footing and fell between the platform and a moving train. Without hesitation, Edwin locked a leg around a railing, grabbed the man, and

pulled him to safety. After the sighs of relief, the young man recognized the famous Edwin Booth. Edwin, however, didn't recognize the young man he'd rescued. That knowledge came weeks later in a letter, a letter he carried in his pocket to the grave. A letter from General Adams Budeau, chief secretary to General Ulysses S. Grant. A letter thanking Edwin Booth for saving the life of the child of an American hero, Robert Todd Lincoln, son of Abraham Lincoln. How ironic that while one brother killed the president, the other brother saved the president's son.

Edwin and James Booth. Same father, mother, profession and passion—yet one chooses life, the other, chose death. How could it happen? I don't know, but it does. Though their story is dramatic, it's not unique. Abel and Cain, both sons of Adam. Abel chooses God. Cain chooses murder. And God lets him. Abraham and Lot, both pilgrims in Canaan. Abraham chooses God. Lot chooses Sodom. And God lets him. David and Saul, both kings of Israel. David chooses God. Saul chooses power. And God lets him. Peter and Judas, both deny their Lord. Peter seeks mercy. Judas seeks death. And God lets him.

In every age of history, on every page of Scripture, the truth is revealed: God allows us to make our own choices. And no one delineates this more clearly than Jesus. We read about the choices we make in the Gospels, in the stories that Jesus shares with us. We can choose between a narrow gate or a wide gate, a narrow road or a wide road, we can build on rock or build on sand, we can serve God or serve mammon (riches), be numbered among the sheep or the goats, we can choose between eternal punishment, or eternal life.

Let's take a moment and look at Abram and his nephew Lot. This story takes place after Abram gets the call to leave his homeland and go off into the wilderness to this so called Promised Land. He has adventure after adventure, and I encourage you to pick up your bibles and go to the first book, Genesis and read his story, it starts on chapter 11. As this morning's scripture alludes to, they're still out wandering around, living in tents. Going here, going there. They had just spent some time in Egypt (where another adventure had just taken place) and were on the move again. In these passages of Genesis, the Bible gives us a prime example of what the man of faith is like; he is like Abraham. While Abram is not perfect, he has what pleases God—great faith. Even in his momentary lapses, which Genesis plainly gives, he still shows his confidence in the promise of God.

Now that Abram has had a renewal of his faith in his pilgrimage back to Bethel, he is faced with yet another test. So great are Abram's and Lot's possessions that the land is not able to bear the burden of their livestock requirements. Strife soon takes foot within their community. It's not just Abram and Lot. It's a whole two clans traveling together. Here is a beautiful case study in relationship between money and happiness. One would think that if anyone could be truly happy, it would have been Abram and Lot under God's blessings. But the material blessings strain the relationships between their herdsmen. Also, Lot must have lamented in his old age the memory of his most important decision in life which now lies in front of him.

As a result of the overgrazing, the herdsmen of Abram and Lot begin to quarrel, threatening the unity of their community. We also get a hint and reminder that the "Canaanite and the Perizzite were dwelling then in the land." It is a reminder that even in the face of this conflict, there is a greater danger. It comes from the native peoples of the promised land. The threat is more significant than it may at first appear. A decision to separate is not easy. Less people means less protection. Less people means more risk. Also, not all of the land was of the same quality to sustain large flocks. It was necessary to keep peace with Lot and his herdsmen; but also the land was inhabited by many people, and so Abram has to deal with the possible consequences of dividing his community and moving part of it in on a hostile people and attempting to settle there. By all accounts, if you put Abram and Lot side by side, it was plain to see who was the boss. Abram. Which makes the offer made by Abram much more amazing.

The chapter is largely a commentary on the difference between living by faith and living by sight and the consequences. Abraham makes the choice of faith, and Lot makes the choice of sight. Abram unbelievably

offers to settle the problem by offering Lot first choice of the land. Verses 10-13 record the choice of Lot. He chooses the most fertile region for himself. Abram extends him generosity beyond belief, and Lot takes him up on it. There is a good deal of emphasis in the text on the beauty of the land toward the plain of Jordan. It was well watered. It is compared to a beautiful spot in Egypt. Abram and Lot part. Lot and his clan head for the beautiful region of the plain, and Abram and his party settle in the more arid Canaan. The writer, however, makes us take note that Lot's choice also puts him closer to Sodom. As I read in a commentary, "This choice of Sodom as a dwelling place was the great mistake of Lot's life. He is the type of that very large class of men who have but one rule for determining at the turning points of life. He was swayed solely by the consideration of worldly advantage. He recognizes no duty to Abram, no gratitude, no modesty; he has no perception of spiritual relations, no sense that God should have something to say in the partition of the land. ... He saw a quick though dangerous road to wealth. There seemed a certainty of success in his earthly calling, a risk only of moral disaster. He shut his eyes to the risk that he might grasp the wealth; and so doing, ruined both himself and his family. ... We are safe to say that after leaving Abram's tents Lot never again enjoyed unconstrainedly happy days.... His soul was daily vexed." Later on, Lot would find himself living in Sodom, right before it's destruction. You might remember from your Sunday School days that Lot was warned by angels to leave, he and his wife, and as they fled, Lot's wife turned back, and turned into a pillar of salt. That's another sermon for another day.

Back to Abraham. After Lot had left him, God told Abram, "Lift up your eyes and look. Arise, walk through the land for all the land which you see I will give to you" The magnitude of God's promise, which he reconfirms here to Abram after Lot's departure, far outweighs what Lot took. It is as far as the eye can see in every direction. It is all of the land even the portion Lot had claimed. Truth be told, it is still the land that Lot had took. As a final part of the confirmation, God commands Abram to walk through the land and claim it as its possessor. This is a symbolic act of possession. Abram obeys and is happy with tent and altar. Lot will suffer because of his greed.

What message do I get from a story like Abram and Lot? There are times when God sends thunder to stir us. There are times when God sends blessings to lure us. But then there are times when God sends nothing but silence as He honors us with the freedom to choose where we spend eternity.

And what an honor it is! In so many areas of life we have no choice. Think about it. You didn't choose your gender. You didn't choose your siblings. You didn't choose your race or place of birth.

Sometimes our lack of choices angers us. "It's not fair," we say. It's not fair that I was born in poverty or that I sing so poorly or that I run so slowly. But the scales of life were forever tipped on the side of fairness when God planted a tree in the garden of Eden. All complaints were silenced when Adam and his descendants were given free will, the freedom to make whatever eternal choice we desire. Any injustice in this life is offset by the honor of choosing our destiny in the next.

I have to keep reminding myself that. How many times do I wish I could wave a magic wand and I get to choose how my life unfolds. I want to weigh 175 pounds. Poof. I don't want a 401K, I want a 501K or a 601K. Poof. I want my kids to get straight A's and never talk back. Poof. I want the Cubs to finally win. Poof must be broken. It would have been nice if God had let us order life like we order a meal. I'll take good health and a high IQ. I'll pass on the quick wit, but give me a fast metabolism...Would've been nice. But it didn't happen. When it came to your life on earth, you weren't given a voice or a vote. But when it comes to life after death, you were. In my book, that seems like a good deal. Wouldn't you agree?

Have we been given any greater privilege than that of choice? Not only does this privilege offset any injustice, the gift of free will can offset any mistakes. Would you have wanted otherwise? Would you have preferred the opposite? We actually believe that's how it works. You choose everything in this life, and God chooses where

you spend the next! The good place, or the bad place. But it's the other way around. We don't get to choose the cards we're dealt with in life. We're supposed to make the best of what we've got. But, we can choose how this game ends, where we end up, the good place or the bad place. Lot made his choice based on sight, not on faith. He was thinking about the now, and not the hereafter.

Just like me, I'm sure that you've made some bad choices in life, haven't you? You've chosen the wrong friends, maybe the wrong career, maybe the wrong spouse. You look back over your life and say, "If only...if only I could make up for those bad choices." You can. One good choice for eternity offsets a thousand bad ones on earth.

The choice is yours.

How can two brothers be born of the same mother, grow up in the same home, and one choose life and the other choose death? I don't know, but they do.

Hanging on their own crosses, how could two men see the same Jesus and one choose to mock Him and the other choose to pray to Him? I don't know, but they did. And when one prayed, Jesus loved him enough to save him. And when the other mocked, Jesus loved him enough to let him.

He allowed him the choice.

He does the same for us.

Choose life, that you might live. Now, and forever.

## Opening

Good morning, OCUMC! We are coming at you, this morning from Hood River. Beautiful town in the Gorge. More of a tourist town now, it used to be almost all agriculture. I know our family likes to take the Fruit Loop when the produce is ripe.

But this town also has a dark chapter. With the rise of current attacks on Asian-Americans in our country, I think it's time to learn the name of Frank T. Hachiya.

Born in Odell in 1920, Frank grew up here. Went to school here. Went to Portland's Multnomah College for a year, in 1941, enrolled at the University of Oregon where he studied political science. Then Pearl Harbor Happened.

You know the history. 120,000 Japanese-Americans were interned in camps for the duration of the war. But 33,000 didn't go to the camps, they went into the military to serve their country.

Frank was one who joined the Military Intelligence Service, translating enemy documents and interrogating prisoners.

Well, here in Hood River, the Hood River American Legion had a Roll of Honor for those who served. And in December of 1944, they removed 16 names. All of Japanese descent. Although they had served as admirably as White soldiers, and were killed disproportionately higher than other servicemen, they took them off the roll. And a firestorm of opinions across the country came in. Even the New York Times chimed in. Hood River had a history of anti-Asian racism for many generations.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, Frank was sent across a valley ahead of his platoon to speak to the enemy. At close range, Frank was shot - it is unsure which side shot him. He retraced his steps across the valley to medics, who treated his wounds and sent him to a battlefield hospital.

Hachiya died on January 3, 1945, and was buried in Grave 4479 in the Armed Forces Cemetery on the island. At the end of the war, he was posthumously awarded the Silver Star and the Distinguished Service Cross.

In the ensuing years, the American Legion reinstated the names on their roll of honor and the City of Hood River has since tried to atone for these sins. These sixteen, and others of Japanese Descent have places of honor, such as at the Memorial Park, or other monuments throughout the city. Even giving the Grand Marshall duties of their annual parade to a few who had suffered at the racism of this earlier generation.

Frank Hachiya's sojourn through Japanese American history did not end on Leyte Island. In September 1948, Hachiya's body arrived in Hood River for services at the Asbury Methodist Church. He was reinterred in Idlewild Cemetery. Another posthumous honor awaited Hachiya in 1980 when the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, dedicated a new building in its Asian language complex in his honor. Those attending included family and war buddies of Frank. One friend, who maintained Frank's headstone at the cemetery, said after the dedication, that the honor brought "a great feeling of pride to all Japanese in this valley."

OCUMC, keep being a church that loves others, values everybody, no matter who they are. Here are this morning's announcements.

## Children's Time:

Have you ever said these lines? "She has more!" "His cup is filled higher!" Her slice is bigger!" "It's not fair!"

Oh, to be a kid facing life's great injustices. There's never true equality when it comes to the division of Cheerios, juice, Lego pieces and cake. We adults who hear these complaints from children often think they have just a few options: 1) Let the kids fight it out and hope for the best, I've tried that theory, hasn't worked the best. Or we can just take the thing away from everyone while stomping and yelling, "That's it! NOBODY GETS ANY!" Yeah, I've done that before. or 3) Get out the measuring tools and divide portions precisely like a scientist. But feeling like a sucker.

Well, in the Bible, two relatives were having this same kind of fight. Abraham and Lot. Two different families. Two different herds. Two different crops. But only one big parcel of land. It was time to split the land into two areas. But how do you do that fairly? One section of the land was really green and well watered, another part was dry and brown. If they just split it evenly it wasn't going to be even.

Abraham came up with the solution. What he did was divide the land into two pieces. The land wasn't the same. One was good land, but had bad neighbors. One was not so good land, but wide open spaces. And Abraham cut it up so that he could be happy with any piece. Now Lot, who didn't choose what the portions looked like, got the first pick. So Abraham got to pick the division, but Lot got to pick which side he wanted. It's fair.

So if you have a cookie to share, one person breaks it in half, and the other person chooses which piece she wants. So you want to cut it as fair as possible.

We did this with playing video games when I was a kid. We only had one controller for our video game. So we had to take turns. So who went first? We could have flipped a coin, but I remember one time we did it this way. My brother said, The first person who gets to play gets to play for 10 minutes. The second person who gets to play gets to play for 15 minutes. OOOOHHH. I wanted to be first, but now it was tempting to wait. And both options now seemed equal.

We didn't know it at the time, but we were doing an Abraham Lot decision making scheme! I cut, you choose. Lot picked the land he wanted, and Abraham went on his way to the land that was left. Pretty cool. Just an idea to put in your toolkit as you try to share things fairly!

Thanks for stopping by!

Prayer

God of loving-kindness,  
creator and sustainer of all,  
you hold all situations and souls in your hands.

You sent Christ into the world  
that we might have life  
and have it abundantly;  
he came as the Prince of Peace  
to a world that is too often tragic and violent.

In the face of gun violence we ask that you come into our world.

In the face of domestic violence, we ask that you come into our world.

In the face of Xenophobia and racism, we ask that you come into our world.

In the face of a political climate in which we can't even agree on the problems, let alone on the solutions, we ask that you come into our world.

In the face of a pandemic we can't seem to find our way out of, we ask that you come into our world.

We come to you in grief  
for those whose lives are cut short or forever changed;  
We come to you in sorrow and in anger  
at the violence in our streets, schools, workplaces and homes;  
We come to you in regret  
for complicity in our culture, for our silence and inaction.

For every person and place we can name, there are hundreds that we do not know. Though little more than statistics to us, we are grateful that they are all known by name by you.

Give us strength to be a comfort for those in loss;  
give us wisdom to be voices of peace in moments of chaos, tension, and fear;  
and give us courage to be a force for change in our communities.

These things we pray in Jesus' name through his prayer...

Offertory:

Welcome to the Offering, our chance to give back. As United Methodists, we support many ministries, within the church, outside the church, at home and abroad. One way that we support our children and youth is to send them away, to camp. For generations, church camp has been a wonderful place for kids to learn about Christ, God's love, and be in the wonders of nature. You send kids to soccer camp so they get better at soccer. We send them to band camp to get better at music. We send them to church camp to become better people, and to help them along their spiritual journey. Now, I don't know what camp will look like this year, if it happens at all - the jury is still out. But it's our hope to provide scholarships to the kids who want to go to one of our United Methodist Church camps. Suttle Lake Camp is one we go to a lot. Camp Magruder at the coast we've counseled at. I was a camp Dean for 20 years in Nebraska, I just really like camp. Check out this United Methodist Camp down by Medford in the Rogue National Forest. Camp Lagawa. The video is a couple of years old, and some leadership has changed, but you'll get the idea.

Thank you, OCUMC, for providing scholarships to our kids, so they can go to camp.

Closing:

Thanks for stopping by OCUMC, and God bless!