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Genesis 19:12-22

We Live, We Love “Looking Back”

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I've been this way as long as I can remember: first come the pictures, then come the words. Case in point this sermon: first I saw the hands of the angels holding the hands of Lot, his wife and their two daughters – two angels four hands, four people four hands: that's all that was needed. The second picture was that of Mrs. Lot (typical, not even referred to by name) looking back and then a block of salt, which was all that was left of her.

Lot and his family had two guardian angels. How many do you have? They were sent by God to rescue and guide the whole lot of them. Who takes your hand when you are frozen in place, stuck in the current mess: that is your life and the condition of the world around you?

The thing about angels is this: they often come with very difficult or even scary news. It is a good thing that most of the time they say, “Do not be afraid.” Yet, the angels didn't offer that consolation this time. Maybe, that was because sometimes it is good to be afraid, for that is what gets us off our duffer and going in the right direction.

In this poignant story, we see all kinds of folks standing still, not showing a bit of forward movement, much less momentum. First, we see Lot's future sons-in-law, who when he tells them they need to leave and go, they laugh in his face. They failed to look ahead, because they were stuck in the now. Why? Maybe, it was too much trouble to pack up and start again. Maybe, it meant leaving too much behind. Maybe, they loved something,

more than they loved themselves. We will never know what caused their inertia and even stupid behavior.

All we know is, they stayed there to their own peril, and thus died. Some of us need to get out of what we are in, but instead of packing up, we laugh. I don't know about you, but the more nervous I am, the funnier I am. Was this nervous laughter because they were unsure whether they could actually manage leaving and moving? Or was there a level of arrogance and superiority, this might have been a smug laugh? Either way, the result was the same, no forward momentum, when their very lives and the lives of their families, depended on it.

Then there was Lot himself, the story tells us, when the guardian angels told him to get away from here as fast as you can, we are told, at first, he just stood still. Where's the forward movement? At first, there is none. And then, even when he is ready to move, he tries to debate his guardian angel regarding the direction he wants, as opposed to the way the angel said to go.

While on eight days of silent retreat, I got a clear signal to make my art more public, rather than have it remain just in the circle of family and friends, and our church. My guardian angels told me after I showed them the art I was willing to make public, "Run, fast." I think they said so, because they knew if I did not it would be to my own peril. Because art is life giving to me, and the making of art is a spiritual practice for me.

And so I embarked on a journey which was to include a website, creating more pieces to show case, business cards, and cold calls to get orders and find buyers. Like brother Lot, I stood still initially – no forward movement at first. Because, I wasn't sure I wanted to leave my own little habitat of private and safe art revelations. So, two of my guardian angels

grabbed me by the hand and dragged me out of my familiar city.

We can be dragged from where we have been, but whether we go forward on the path we need to travel or the trail we need to run depends on our willingness to actually go. The guardian angels can only take us so far, to the city limits; after that we need to venture forth without their hand-holding. For there comes a time for all of us, when we must go forward willingly and with commitment.

A word of loving advice here, and a warning too: even if we want something for someone and they don't want it for themselves; we cannot do it for them. We can lend a hand, but in the end the steps that really lead somewhere must be theirs. The real truth is you can't make someone do something they don't want to do, adults for sure, but I think teens and children as well.

Now, onto Mrs. Lot, she's the other one who got stuck. Yet, the sad part of her story is that she remained permanently stuck. Now, before we drag her under the bus, I think we need to be honest with ourselves. All of us have used our swivel neck to look back.

Like her, we have thought that what lies behind is better, because it is more familiar than the unfamiliar that lies ahead:
1 point for comfort, 0 points for the unknown,
1 point for at least I know what I've got, 0 points for taking a risk,
1 point for the devil you know, 0 points for the devil you don't know (presupposing it is a devil, and not an angel).

So many of us stand still or stay stuck because we have concluded that when doing life we need to go solo. Yet, the truth of the matter is, life is a team sport actually, and we think we have to or even should go solo, which is an illusion and never works out in actuality, though many of us give it a good go.

At the very least, life should be played as doubles. Life should be dealt with as if it is a doubles tennis match. Now I am not suggesting everyone needs to be married or partnered. Rather, what I am saying is that we need to take a hold of somebody's hand near someone who has nothing, but the best of intentions when it comes to you and your life.

Sometimes, we need to handle life like it is a volleyball game. We need to get with three others who can show us how to ace life, who are willing to do an assist for us, or who can help us get on the attack, and spike the ball when necessary.

Sometimes, we need to handle life like we're in an eight-person boat where we have a coxswain who says,
"Hands in" – put your boat in the water
"Sit in – get into the boat
"Count down" – call out your seat number when ready to row,
"At the catch" – put your oars in the water,
"Look ahead" – make sure you are not overtaken by others,
"Firm up" – apply more pressure as needed,
Power 10 – take 10 strokes at more than full pressure.

It is hard to watch someone remain:
when they desperately need to move forward,
stand still when they need to move quickly,
looking only backwards, when they should be only looking straight ahead.

Given this, and all we've talked about thus far. How about each of us move forward by recommitting ourselves to being a guardian angel for at least someone else, and then commit to keep moving forward even when your guardian angel has dropped his or her hand and you've reached the city limits. No worries though, for God's got your back, and is right behind you every step of the way. Hallelujah, for that!