

Genesis 12:1-4

(Lectionary Year A, Lent 2)

By Beth Barnett

Reflecting on the story of Abram as a wanderer, the gathering makes pictures from stones as prayer for the future for the refugees in the world, inspired by the art of Syrian Niza Ali Badr.

You will need:

- River stones (unpolished) of differing sizes
- Pictures of Nizar Ali Badr Pebble Stories (<http://vsmart.com/nizar-ali-badr-pebble-stories>)

Time required:

10 minutes

Connect

Today we are going to use these stones to pray in pictures.

We have heard the ancient Bible story of Abram who left his homeland and became a wanderer, and we hear constantly the stories of refugees who must leave their homeland and travel far to find even just a bit more safety - often still living with risk and hardship in their new places.

I wonder if we are wanderers, or one who wonders - or something in between?

Let's find out!



Spend a few minutes telling someone else near you how many different places you have lived, and how far from the place you were born you have moved.

Decide whether you think you are a wanderer or a stayer.

(If you have time, take some feedback from the group – perhaps asking who has moved the furthest or the stayed in the one place, or taking a head count of those who identify as ‘wanderers’ and those who see themselves as ‘stayers’.)

Context

In Genesis 12, as Abram’s story unfolds, and indeed throughout the rest of the Bible, Abram is held as an example for others, of faith, of what living life in God’s ways looks like.

Here at the beginning of his story, we see Abram packing up and leaving his country. He seeks life somewhere else. Abram is not a refugee in the sense that we know of many refugees across the world in our time; he is not forced from his homeland by violence or poverty.

But Abram becomes a person without land, without national identity, and without citizenship. He loses his stability and security. He becomes vulnerable to the various policies of the kings and rulers of the lands through which he travels.

The life that God calls Abram to can challenge the way we think about the way God is connected in the lives of refugees in our world today, as their lives are perhaps more like Abram’s than some of our lives.

Their lives are vulnerable, often made harder by the misunderstanding or outright heartlessness of those in power in the countries they move through seeking life. Refugee lives are filled with risks - but also run on hope.

Content

Today we are going to use these stones to make some picture prayers. The idea for this comes from a Syrian artist called Nizar Ali Badr.

(Display pictures of Badr’s Pebble Stories on Screen or in hardy copy form.)

He uses the stones of his country to create art that tells the stories refugees who have been forced out of Syria.

Nizar works on the roof of his house where the electricity has been cut off. It is too expensive for him to glue the stones in place to make the pictures, so all of his art is temporary. He takes photos of it, but then the art is destroyed.

The artist Badr says,

“Unfortunately each time I finish a stone sculpture I have to destroy it, because fixing stones with special glue on special supports has become far too expensive nowadays...So when I create a stone sculpture, I know with certainty that there is nothing there to hold it together. It will, undoubtedly, be destroyed in time, [it] requires an ability to let go of attachment to material items and to understand the temporal nature of all things in life.”

We have seen how Nizar Ali Badr’s art expresses the significance of the land and heaviness and hardness of life for the Syrian people and for refugees.

Let’s begin our prayer with a few moments thinking of others who bear these heavy hard burdens.

Then together as an act of prayer, let’s create a picture of the life we would hope for all the people of the world...

At the end of our gathering, these pictures will be broken apart, just like Nizar’s and like the lives of refugees whose lives are broken apart and undone, and are remade again and again in new places.

Consequence

Join with me in praying together the prayer that is up on the screen: I invite you to join with me out aloud on the bold lines: **We are blessed to be a blessing to others.**

Loving God,

We know that we have been greatly blessed in this land.

We are Blessed to be a blessing to others.

We hear your challenging call to Abram – that he would be blessed in order to bless others.

Blessed to be a blessing to others.

We have prayed in pictures made of stones for the refugees of the world – prayers of blessing for them. Now please make us part of the answers to these prayers.

We are Blessed to be a blessing to others.

Let hearts of stone in our land, be turned to compassion and justice like your heart, Our God, and let the blessings of this land become blessings for many more.

We are Blessed to be a blessing to others.

Let those people – families, children, older people, those travelling alone, whose own land has been made hard through violence and conflict, find home and blessing here among us.

We are Blessed to be a blessing to others.

in the name of Jesus,

Amen.



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Nizar Ali Badr Pebble Stories

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