

Genesis 12:1-9

12:1 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.

12:2 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.

12:3 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."

12:4 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.

12:5 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. When they had come to the land of Canaan,

12:6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

12:7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

12:8 From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east, and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord.

12:9 And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Sermon: I Feel Fine

Colt and Wyatt, this morning, I want to have a conversation with the two of you, and I hope the congregation will listen in. I'll admit to you that it's been a long time since I graduated from high school – I'm not sure how it is that three decades go by so fast – but I've been thinking about what I was up to the summer of my own graduation, and I've been trying to imagine what the two of you might be thinking or feeling in this season.

And one thing that comes to mind is music. There are a couple of dozen songs from my youth that instantly take me back to 1995. I can see right where I was when I first heard a particular song; I get little glimpses of a season that has long expired; I have these little bursts of energy, and happy memories, and a sense of a whole future in front of me.

Now I want to tell you that I love music, but I am not musically talented; I possess a good soul, but I have never been soulful; I clap on the downbeat; I sing offkey and out of tune. But I love the both of you enough to sing today, and I just don't think there's anyway to make my point without singing. Also, your parents are my age, so if you don't resonate with this next bit, I think they will.

So...I need you to imagine it's June of 1995. Rather than this suit, I am wearing a flannel shirt, yes, in June, because, Grunge man! I've got bangs, and I turn my baseball cap backwards, but I don't pull my bangs back, I let the strap of the hat cover the bangs so that they stick to my forehead. I'm rocking Converse One-Stars. Obviously. And me and my crew are rolling around town in my friend Brad's 1982 Ford Escort hatchback – it's the Carolina Blue championship edition. It's probably one of the ten ugliest cars ever invented.

And Brad's car stereo is worth more than his car. He went over to Circuit City, and he had the factory version removed, and he put a Pioneer in that baby. And just to be safe, he got the version where you can pop off the face of it so nobody can steal it. And for Christmas he got a Sony Discman, and it had this attachment with a cord, and a fake cassette tape, and you put the tape in your stereo tape deck, and it tricked the stereo into playing your CD, and it would work, unless you were on a bumpy road, and then the disc would just keep skipping, and you'd miss about every fifth word of the track.

So...I think you get the picture. It's 1995, and clearly, clearly, I'm someone who's going places. Probably Handy Hugo's to get a Big Slam of Mountain Dew, maybe McDonalds if management doesn't accuse us of loitering. I'm riding shotgun, I look in Brad's CD wallet (he had splurged for one with a hard case and felt-lined sleeves). And you know what happens next. I'm choosing something from R.E.M. Tape deck engaged. Hit play on the discman. Listen to it spin. Volume up...

Drum solo...

That's great, it starts with an earthquake
Birds and snakes, an aeroplane
Lenny Bruce is not afraid

Eye of a hurricane, listen to yourself churn
World serves its own needs, don't mis-serve your own needs
Feed it up a knock, speed, grunt, no strength
No ladder structure, clatter with fear of height, down height
Wire in a fire, representing seven games in a
Government for hire and a combat site left her
Wasn't coming in a hurry with the
Furies breathing down your neck

Team by team reporters baffled, trump, tethered, crop
Look at that low plane, fine, then
Uh, oh, overflow, population, common group
But it'll do, save yourself, serve yourself
World serves its own needs listen to your heart bleed
Tell me with the rapture and the revered and the right
Right you vitriolic, patriotic, slam, fight, bright light
Feeling pretty psyched

It's the end of the world as we know it
It's the end of the world as we know it
It's the end of the world as we know it
And I feel fine

Guitar riff. Awesome!
Three more verses like this.
More guitar riffs.

Jumping up and down and screaming the lyrics for four minutes. And then doing it two or three more times.

What in the world are you talking about, Bob? Why would you choose to sing this song?

So...this song is absurd. It really is. Michael Stipe had a dream, and it was about going to a cocktail party where everyone had the initials L.B. Parts of this song are literally just a random stream of consciousness jotted down on a napkin and set to music. But it's also very poignant.

And look, I know you two are probably already using AI to research R.E.M. as I'm talking to you. And yes, this song was written in 1987, so I was clearly not a senior in high school when I first heard it. The more accurate parallel of a contemporary song for me would be their song *What's Your Frequency Kenneth*, which did come out in 1995. And it has an even better guitar riff – it is a real banger. But that song is about a stalker attacking Dan Rather, so it's not really the primo choice for a baccalaureate sermon.

But if you were around between 1987 and 1995, the world was a volatile place. Stipe writes this song before the fall of the Berlin Wall, while Apartheid still stands in South Africa, during the height of the AIDS epidemic, and in the same year of a substantial market recession and Wall Street crash.

And as I was listening to the song in my formative years, violence was raging in Ireland and Rwanda, we were processing something called don't ask, don't tell, and people were already theorizing something called the Y2K crisis – all of our machines would

suddenly stop working because we only used two digits to mark the calendar year, and somehow they would all think it was gonna be 1900 in a few years. It's the end of the world as we know it.

But this isn't a doomsday song, this isn't some vision of an apocalyptic future. The lyrics implore us to meet a chaotic world with the energy and hope of youthfulness. Yes, it is the end of the world as we know it, but it is most certainly not the end of the world. Rather, this moment, indeed every moment, even with its ups and downs, is the beginning of every possibility. This moment is a chance to shake up the system. This moment is the opportunity to step into who you will become. This is joyful. It's the end of the world as we know it. And I feel fine!

I just read you a passage from Genesis. Abram and Sarai, who will eventually become Abraham and Sarah, are covenanted with God, and blessed. They are promised progeny, land, and blessings. Their story continues a theme of Genesis: the end of the world as we know it, and the end of God as we experience Them.

In the beginning, we hear the primordial history – the creation and formation of the world, and of the first earth creatures. As the story continues, the world gets a little older, the people get a little more layered – outside of the garden, the further east we go from Eden, life gets more and more complicated. When Abram and Sarai come onto the scene, we're no longer dealing with one family, but an entire nation. And we are experiencing a God who is revealed in even more compelling ways, who offers even more intentional and remarkable grace than before.

It's the end of the world as we know it. A rather obscure, unremarkable, ordinary man named Abram, who lives out his faith in very subtle ways is chosen as a conduit or connector for facilitating the blessings of 42 generations of Israel. He's not rich. He's not famous. He's not even particularly wholesome. And yet grace abounds. We now know God as a force that is accessible and ever-present in our lives.

The earliest Jesus followers lived in chaotic times, too. The Jerusalem Temple got sacked, Vesuvius erupted, Rome's excess rattled decorum. And yet we hear about an Acts Church that thrives, that pools its goods and possessions, where all who have need are provided for. They worship God with great joy, and they break bread together with glad and generous hearts. Sure, it's the end of the world as we know it, but it's not the end of the world. It's the beginning of an era where in seeing our connectedness with one another, we channel the Spirit of God now and forever.

And my goodness, Colt and Wyatt, your own time is as volatile as any we've known. We've read about wealth gaps throughout the whole of history, but the one we know today is as pronounced as it's ever been. More than a fifth of your peers reside in food insecure homes, and your generation will find it much harder than your parents and grandparents to buy a home, or pay off college debt, or enter the job market, or simply stretch a dollar like you could in 1966 or 1986 or even 2006.

But you are also a generation that has more knowledge than any before it; that intentionally acknowledges and celebrates the diversity and depth of God's wonderful creation, and the all the creatures that fill it; whose empathy is their superpower. I think that

perhaps, finally, there is a generation among us who refuses to be limited to the questions, challenges, and methods its predecessors have left for them, and instead, is asking their own, better questions, discovering the new challenges that come with such questions, and dreaming and daring of new ways to meet this moment. It's the end of the world as you know it, as we know it; It's the beginning of the world as you will heal it.

I hope there's a song (or several) for you that inspires joy, and reminds you that your giftedness, your energy, your presence are worth sharing. And of course, I hope it's a song you'll sing with the windows rolled down, jumping all over the place, with friends who have your back. Of course, I wouldn't dare guess the title or artist – I'm afraid the current algorithms in my feeds only share the music of my generation, and that of girls aged 4 to 10. But that's okay, I hear vinyl is making a comeback. Maybe your generation will make to happen, too!

Colt, Wyatt, it's the end of the world as you know it. I sure hope you feel fine! Thanks be to God! Amen.