

Trusting God

“The God Who Calls”

Genesis 12:1-9

Hebrews 11:8-12

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The logo you see on the overhead screen (*and the last page of this document*) is the official logo of the Presbyterian Church USA, our denomination. There are a number of symbols incorporated in the logo – a descending dove and flames of fire (symbols of the Holy Spirit), a cross, the most recognized symbol of the Christian faith, and an open Bible sitting on a pulpit. Do you see it? The Bible is there because as Presbyterian Christians we believe that the Bible is God’s Holy Word, the Bible does not “contain” God’s Word – it is God’s Word. In our tradition we submit to the authority of scripture. Perhaps you are thinking, “Well, of course, that’s obvious, everybody knows that.” But sometimes that which is obvious needs to be said.

I’m saying it this morning because we are beginning a new sermon series on the life of Abraham, from the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis (*“beginnings”*). As we read, study and hear sermons from these ancient stories of Abraham, we not only learn about a towering historical figure, we discover the nature of God. We believe that the Bible is God’s story. It is the account of God’s dealing with humanity from creation (Genesis 1-2) to the fall of humanity into sin by disobedience to God (Genesis 3), to God’s great drama of salvation. That drama begins in the heart of God, in God’s gracious desire to reconcile his highest creation – man and woman – to himself.

Abraham, who we first meet as Abram in our scripture text this morning, is an important character in this great sovereign plan of salvation. Little is known about Abram prior to this invitation, this call, which comes to him in the first verse of Genesis 12. We know from Genesis 11 that Abram is from a place called Ur, an ancient city located near the Persian Gulf in the nation we now know as Iraq. We know that Abram and his extended family left Ur for Haran, close to the city of Baghdad. This is where Abram’s adventure of faith begins.

We are simply told that, *“the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’”* And then Abram is given a three part promise: *“I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you so that you will be a blessing, and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

Of course we know the rest of this story, we know that God was faithful to his promises, that Abram did become the “father” of a great nation, and his descendants were as “numerous as the stars” (Genesis 15:5). And we know that the greater promise to

Abram, “in you all families of the earth shall be blessed” is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and God’s offer of salvation that comes to all people through him.

But, if we put ourselves back into Abram’s situation, things look a little different. You see, Abram and his wife Sarai didn’t have a child, and appeared to be beyond child bearing years! You don’t need a land, and can’t become a great nation without an heir, a first born child. And then there’s the question of where was God calling Abram to go? The New Testament text from Hebrews that I read this morning makes it very clear, Abram “*set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance, and he set out, not knowing where he was going.*” (11:8)!

The only thing Abram knew was the God who called him – and that was enough! You see this passage of scripture, this Abraham story, can be reduced to two things: a faithful God who calls, and an obedient Abram who responds to God’s faithfulness. And this call, by this faithful God, is repeated again and again and again through the pages of the Old and New Testaments, through the history of the Church, right down to this morning – January 10, 2010, right here in Vancouver, Washington, USA!

Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca – Moses ,Joshua – Ruth and Boaz – David, Solomon, the prophets and poets – John the Baptist, Joseph and Mary, Simeon, Anna, Mary Magdalene, Peter and Paul, Lydia, Origin, St Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Jonathan Edwards, Dwight Moody, Billy Graham, Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa - men and women who heard the call of t his same faithful God and responded in obedience.

God said to Abram “*Go . . . Where? Don’t worry about where, I’ll show you as you go!*” A ship can only be directed when it is untied from its mooring! God, in Jesus Christ, calls us to follow him – where? Anywhere, everywhere. The call to become a follower, a disciple of Jesus Christ is, as one commentator writes “*dangerously open-ended*” (Brueggeman, Genesis, p. 118). The Christian faith is a journey, and you know, we simply don’t know where it might take us in this life. But we do know the faithfulness of the God that calls us – and like Abram, that’s enough!

My favorite hymn expresses it well:

*Great is Thy Faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee . .*

*Great is Thy Faithfulness . . .
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord unto me*

. We will learn in the coming weeks that Abraham is no super-hero. In fact, in the last half of Genesis 12, our text next week, Abram blunders badly! And all of those individuals I just named are flawed. The heroes of our faith are ordinary men and women, like Abram and Sarai, whose greatest ability is their avail-ability.

This is good news for us. God called to Abram, and God, in Jesus Christ, calls us – *“Follow me . . . leave everything else and find your life in relationship to me.”* This is the Gospel – thanks be to God.

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