

Sermon for Morning Prayer - Trinity IV Morning Prayer C

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Lessons:

First Lesson: Genesis 12:1-9

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

Second Lesson: Gal 3:1-9

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye

therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Text:

It's a hard thing to leave familiar surroundings and people and procedures you know and go off into strange territory and an uncertain future. Psychiatrists tell us, and experience confirms, that people will often cling to something that is uncomfortable or even painful simply because it is familiar.

I've known older people who refuse to move out of a house in a dangerous neighborhood and in obvious disrepair, just because they have lived there a long time. I've known women who have stayed with drunken husbands who beat them, and then, when they finally leave they move in with other men just like the first ones. I've talked to men just out of prison who were so afraid of living on their own and taking care of themselves that they were ready to commit a crime just to get back in. Prison life is hard, but it is familiar. When the Berlin wall came down and East Germany moved away from communism, there were people who didn't like it. Freedom is scary and uncertain.

Sometimes change gets thrust upon us, like it or not. A man gets transferred to another part of the country, or even to a foreign country, or even worse, he loses his job altogether. A married woman suddenly finds herself a widow. A son or daughter gets married, or goes away to college, or into the armed forces. A parent dies. Someone gets crippled in an accident. Suddenly life is different. The world changes. We're not sure what to expect.

But no matter what else may change, God never changes, and He never forsakes us. He sometimes calls us out of the familiar and into strange situations, even dangerous ones, even painful ones. But He promises always to go with us and take care of us.

In the Old Testament lesson today we meet a man who has such an experience. His name is Abram. When we first meet him he is living with his extended family in a city called Ur, in modern Iraq. For some undisclosed reason his father decides to relocate, probably for business purposes. The family gets as far as Haran, which is

in modern Turkey, and the father likes it there so he decides to stay. He dies there, and Abram takes his place as head of the family.

So here we have a man living in what has become a familiar place, a place to which his father brought him. He is surrounded by relatives and friends, and he is heir to the family business, which seems to be prospering. Then along comes this deity, who is different from the pagan deities that Abram's father knew, and says to Abram, "Go from your country, and your kindred, and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

That's pretty vague. Abram was 75 years old and in a comfortable situation, and God didn't even tell him where he wanted him to go. How many of us would respond to a call like that?

Well, God made two promises to Abram. He said, "I will bless you, and I will make you a blessing to others." And Abram believed those promises and went off into a very uncertain future. He became known as Abraham, the great ancestor of three monotheistic religious traditions, including our own.

But it's not really Abraham that I want to talk about today. I really want to talk about God – the God who revealed himself to Abram and called him venture into the unknown. What kind of God is this who is so different from the pagan deities of the ancient world?

Well, first of all he is not a god who is confined to any particular place. In ancient times each city and each country had its own sponsoring deity. When you moved from one place to another, you left behind the old god and worshiped the new local god or gods. But the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham inhabits all time and all space. You may feel his presence more intensely in some places than in others, but he is not and will not be confined.

The psalmist says, "Whither shall I go from thy presence? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there. If I go down to hell, thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say peradventure the darkness shall cover me the darkness and light are both alike to thee." And hear this verse: "Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb."

Wherever you go, God is there ahead of you, and that includes death. Christ has gone before us through what the Prayer Book calls “the grave and gate of death.” And the collect for Sunday after the ascension asks God to “exalt us unto the same place whither our Savior Christ is gone before.”

The paths to which God calls us may be unfamiliar to us but they are not unfamiliar to Him. The only uncertainty in God’s mind is whether we will have the faith to follow Him wherever He leads. Abraham had such faith, and, as St. Paul says, “It was counted to him as righteousness.”

The God of Abraham is never content to leave well enough alone. He is constantly calling people to new and different paths that involve elements of danger as well as opportunity, and sometimes suffering also. He does not ask us to understand him. He asks us to trust him.

We like to think that our families and our friends and our familiar routines and surroundings make us secure. We like to think that our knowledge and our possessions make us secure. But they don’t. That feeling of security is an illusion which can very quickly disappear. The only real security we have is in the promises of God.

“Heaven and earth shall pass away”, says Jesus, “but my words shall not pass away.” If you believe that, then follow the example of Abraham and go out in faith wherever God leads you.

In the concluding prayer of the Eucharist we ask that we may do all such good works as [God] has prepared for us to walk in. As I approached retirement, I kept wondering what those works might be. In God’s good time, he led me here. And God will also lead you in his good time to a place that he will show you.

Leave what you must when he calls you. Bring with you the lessons you have learned and the hope that is held out to you. Let yesterday pass with dignity. The God of Abraham is waiting for you and will lead you as you go into a new tomorrow.

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