

“Will We Have the Courage???”

Today we begin our journey through the Old Testament,
but in Year 1 of the our Narrative Lectionary we don't start at the beginning,
so let me quickly set Genesis 12 in context.

Imagine looking at a picture of the cosmos,
and then watching as the camera focuses down to a single planet called earth
while the stories of the Creation, Adam & Eve, the Fall, Cain & Abel, and Noah & the Flood – are told .
Then imagine the camera focusing down again, this time to one particular person – Abram,
or as he is later known, Abraham.

From this point on, the entire Biblical story is about Abraham and his descendants.
And the story begins like this:

*GOD said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people, your home behind, and go to a place I will lead you,
and I will bless you and through you the entire world will be blessed.”*

What Jews and Christians and Muslims and others have puzzled over and argued about for 4000 years
is what made God choose this seemingly random person to receive God's special blessing.
The controversy is known as “the scandal of election” –
God's choosing of a particular person or a particular nation for particular favor.

But what if it isn't about the scandal of election, about God choosing this one particular person?
What if – what if -- it happened like this:

*GOD said to Tom, “Leave everything behind, and go to a place I'll lead you,
and I'll bless you and the whole world through you.”*

And Tom said, “Travel from here to God-knows-where? That's a terrible idea. No thank you.”

*GOD said to Dick, “Leave everything behind, and go to a place I'll lead you,
and I'll bless you and the whole world through you.”*

And Dick said, “Hmm.... Don't think so.”

*GOD said to Harry, “Leave everything behind, and go to a place I'll lead you,
and I'll bless you and the whole world through you.”*

And Harry said, “Hell, no. I'm quite happy where I am, thank you very much.”

*God said to Abram, “Leave everything behind, and go to a place I'll lead you,
and I'll bless you and the whole world through you.”*

And Abram, who was 75 years old at the time, left Haran & began the journey as GOD had instructed.

What if it isn't about God choosing one person out of the entire world's population for special blessing?
What if it is simply about the one person who took God up on God's offer?

Tom, Dick and Harry may have had very full and happy lives – or not. We'll never know.
We'll never know because their faith stories were never lived out
nor passed on from generation to generation.

Abraham's faith story was lived out, and the story was passed on to the next generation,
who continued to live out Abraham's and its own faith story,
passing on the story, and continuing to live it out, generation after generation after generation –
right up to you and me, gathered here at Salem, today,
as well as to every Jewish, Christian and Muslim person
who traces their ancestry in the faith back to Abraham.

GOD said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people, your home behind, and go to a place I will lead you, and I will bless you and through you the entire world will be blessed."

And God's call to every person and to every community of faith remains the same – not in a literal sense, but in a figurative one:

"Leave behind the things that keep you stuck where you are,
and move forward – not with the comfort of a map – but following me in faith,
and I will bless you, and you will in turn make a difference for good in the world."

God calls each one of us to do that:

to leave behind the things that keep us stuck where we are,
and to move forward to wherever it is that God is calling us.

It's not easy.

Yesterday at the women's retreat we watched Brené Brown's TED talk on the Power of Vulnerability and in it she said that as a researcher she has discovered that there are 2 categories of people:

those who believe they are worthy and those who don't.

Those who believe they are worthy are whole-hearted people

who have the courage to let go of who they thought they should be and fully embrace their vulnerability.

That means leaving the comfortable and familiar behind

in order to step into a future in which we are:

willing to say I love you first;

willing to do something for which there is no guarantee;

willing to breathe through waiting for the doctor to call after your test;

willing to invest in a relationship that may or may not work out.

Living out our faith as whole-hearted people

means understanding that God calls us to stop trying to control and predict our lives,
and instead live with vulnerability as we trust in God's deep and abiding love for us

God says,

"Leave behind the things that keep you stuck where you are,
and move forward – not with the comfort of a map – but following me in faith,
and I will bless you, and you will in turn make a difference for good in the world."

God calls every community of faith, every congregation, to do that as well:

to leave behind the things that keep us stuck where we are,
and to move forward to wherever it is that God is calling us.

That's no easier to do as a congregation than it is in our personal lives, for that, too, takes courage –

the courage to go where we've never gone before;

the courage to believe that what makes us vulnerable also makes us beautiful;

the courage to trust that while vulnerability is the core of our fear and grief and struggle,

it is also the birthplace of belonging, love, creativity, and joy. [*Brené Brown's TED talk "The Power of Vulnerability"*]

God's command and promise continue to come to us, both personally and as a congregation.

"Leave behind the things that keep you stuck where you are,
and move forward – not with the comfort of a map – but following me in faith,
and I will bless you, and you will in turn make a difference for good in the world."

What is God calling you to leave behind? What is God calling us as a congregation to leave behind?

We can be like Tom, Dick and Harry and turn down the deal.

Or we can be like Abram and do what God asks:

leave behind the things that keep us stuck and move forward in faith,

trusting that God is not only leading us, but that God will bless us, and through us will bless the world.

We all know what the right thing is to do.

The question is: will you, will I, and will this congregation have the courage to do it? **Amen**