



KNOW • GROW • CONNECT • SERVE • GLORIFY

## **Eastminster Worship Services**

Sunday, September 20, 2009

### **Never the Same: When the Word Changes You**

#### ***Why Me?***

Genesis 12:1-20

Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh, Senior Pastor

Every time I read this passage, I ask myself two questions, “What went through Abram’s mind when God told him to leave Haran and go to Ur of the Chaldeas?” and “Why did Abram lie about Sarai being his sister, not his wife?” Sudden change can be difficult. To trust that the new place, new friend or new job will be safe, comfortable, productive and encouraging, just like the old, is difficult at best. To leave the familiar is challenging. Abram must have been asking, “Why me?”

Many face difficult and challenging times. Children on the streets in Calcutta are wondering when they will eat again. Students have come to a new city and new university. American workers are bewildered with the economic recession. Millions have lost their jobs and more are in jeopardy. Water from the Delta to the Central Valley of California has been shut off to the farmers in order to protect smelt and salmon. The Valley is turning into a dust bowl. Some of you in this Sanctuary are facing the possibility of unemployment, children leaving home, health problems and the torment of low self-esteem. All of us experience difficult and challenging times. The question remains, however, “Why me?”

The Word of God states that Abram was told to “Leave your country, your people, and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.” Notice two words. First, the imperative “Leave.” Imperatives are not optional. God did not say, “Think about leaving or consider leaving.” No, God said, “Leave!” And second, the imperative “Go.” Abram was commanded to go to a new land.

God had a reason for disrupting Abram’s comfortable existence. The last seven words of verse two state the reason, that is “...so that you will be a blessing.” blessing. How would Abram’s life be a blessing? First, God would make of Abram a great nation. Second, God would bless Abram. And third, God would make Abram’s name great. God would transform Abram and his family into a blessing.

“So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran...Abram took his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.”<sup>1</sup> Not only did Abram believe God’s promise for himself, but also on behalf of his family. Do not forget this truth every time you witness the baptism of an infant. Abram believed the covenant for himself and on behalf of his family. Abram’s obedience not only implicated himself, but also those whom he loved. Abram’s decision to be obedient had consequences, consequences that would not only impact his life, but also the lives of many others.

When Abram arrived in Shechem, to the oak of Moreh, Abram saw the Canaanites, a foreign people who did not worship Yahweh. And at that moment, God said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” In response to God’s faithfulness, Abram built an altar to the LORD.<sup>2</sup> Abram was obedient. God was faithful to Abram. The plan for human redemption that began in the Garden, continued through Noah and took the next great step through Abram. Abram’s obedience continued as he arrived in Bethel. There too, he obeyed the LORD and built an altar.<sup>3</sup>

The story is told by Bryan Wilkerson, the pastor at Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts, that one spring day, two friends set out on a canoe trip in the wilderness of Ontario. After paddling for many hours, they came to a portage, a trail through the woods that would take them to their next lake. The sun was low in the sky, but they wanted to get to that next lake and make camp, so they decided to go ahead. As they reached the halfway point, they encountered an extensive swath of trees blown over by a windstorm.

The trail was nearly impassable, but they managed to pick their way over and under and around the obstacles and continued ahead. It was getting dark. It wasn’t long before they began to feel something was wrong. They were off the trail. They considered going back to where they had started in order to get

---

<sup>1</sup>Genesis 12:4-5

<sup>2</sup>Genesis 12:7

<sup>3</sup>Genesis 12:8-9

back on the trail. They pressed ahead. Before long they both had that sick feeling you get in the pit of your stomach when you know you're lost, but neither was prepared to admit it. They found themselves in swampy lowland with no idea where the lake or trail was.

One of them said, "Let's get out the compass." They did, and set their bearings for the northeast, the direction the trail had been heading. They plowed through thick underbrush and eventually they stumbled upon the lake they'd been looking for. After setting camp, they reflected on the lessons of the day. Lesson one: If you lose the trail, go back to where you last had your bearings. Lesson two: When in doubt, get out the compass. Lesson three: Believe the compass.

At Shechem and Bethel, Abram was on the trail. He was not lost. He built altars to God for his faithfulness. But a fork in the road appeared. Genesis 12:10-13 reads, "Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know what a beautiful woman you are.' When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."

What would Abram do in this new time of difficulty and challenge? He didn't believe that God would take care of him so he asked Sarai to lie and so she did. The Egyptians saw that she was a very beautiful woman. Pharaoh's officials took her to him and Abram was treated well and Sarai served Pharaoh. But then it happened. The truth was made known. The LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. And Pharaoh wanted to know why Abram had not told the truth. Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had. Difficult and challenging times are opportunities for us to meet with God.<sup>4</sup>

This journey of faith is not easy. There will be disappointment, setback and temptation. That's what's happened to Abram. Instead of trusting God in the famine to meet his needs, Abram relied on his own knowledge and went to Egypt. Egypt, in the Old Testament, almost always represents a worldly

---

<sup>4</sup>Adapted from Genesis 12:14-20

response to a spiritual challenge. Whenever the people of Israel came against some enemy, they were tempted to form an alliance with Egypt, to rely on that nation's military and economic strength. Instead of trusting God to provide in Canaan, Abram chose to go to Egypt. The same is true for you and for me.

We could ask, "Abram, what were you thinking? The journey began so well. You went to Canaan. You built two altars. Faith, courage and obedience got you there. Now, Abram, why do you choose to use deception and manipulation to accomplish something? What were you thinking, Abram?" We can almost sympathize and hear Abram ask, "Why me?" It's not the last time Abram behaved this way. He tried the same scheme again to save himself from King Abimelech, with disastrous results. On another occasion, when he and Sarai begin to panic about God's ability to provide a descendant, they came up with their own scheme, by which he would have a child through her maidservant Hagar. Abram takes matters into his own hands so many times it's been called his signature sin.

How many times do we come to some difficult and challenging problem and instead of trusting God, we flounder in search of a better way? Our deviation from God's path happens one step at a time. Nobody gets lost all at once. You need the job, so you lie on the application, then in the interview. Soon you're deceiving customers. You're feeling lonely one night, so you click on the pornographic website just this once. Before you know it, you're down in Egypt. We all have a tendency to make our own way instead of following God. It leads to hurt and heartache for us and everyone involved. In Abram's case, unwitting people were led into sin and afflicted with diseases. Sarai was exploited. Abram dishonored the name of God. So it is with our wrong choices and sinful schemes.

Let's come back to the lessons learned by the two canoeists. Lesson one: If you lose the trail, go back to where you last had your bearings. Some of us need to admit we're lost. Don't waste another day in Egypt. Lesson two: When in doubt, get out the compass. Maybe you're getting discouraged; you're beginning to panic and thinking you need to find your own way around the mess. Don't do it. Get out the compass. Lesson three: Believe the compass. Trust God and his call on your life.

How do you respond in the difficult and challenging times in your life? Remember, God told

Abram to “leave” and to “go.” Whatever the challenge you face, God is not only present with you, but God is the one who ordained it. Nothing happens to us by accident. There are no accidents in God’s will for humanity. Difficulty and challenges are not a coincidence. The question isn’t “Why is this happening?” but “What must I now do in the midst of this difficulty and challenge?” This is the doctrine of providence. Providence is the doctrine “that God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he keeps them existing; God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and directs them to fulfill his purposes.”<sup>5</sup>

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. The Word asserts that God is the author of life; that sin is deadly, but God has a way out of the predicament; that there is a way for a new beginning; that God’s intent for you and me is other than we deserve; that God will accomplish incredible things through you; that God remembers you even when you forget him.

God always met Abram in his unfaithfulness. Through repentance, Abram’s faith was credited to him as righteousness.<sup>6</sup> Abram’s faith healed him, just like the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years.<sup>7</sup>

I believe that our congregation is on the precipice of moving from an institutional understanding of church to one that is missional. God is asking us to become a blessing to a hurting world. Quoting Blaise Pascal, “It is only in his wounds that the risen Christ can be touched.” God is saying to each one of us this day, “Leave the familiar” and “Go to the unknown.” God will meet us in the difficult and challenging times we face. God remembers you even when you forget him. We will be a blessing. Let us pray!

Copyright © 2009  
Steven M. Marsh  
All Rights Reserved.

E A S T M I N S T E R P R E S B Y T E R I A N C H U R C H

1958 N. Webb Road • Wichita, Kansas 67206-3404 • p 316.634.0337 f 316.634.1496 • [www.eastminster.org](http://www.eastminster.org)

---

<sup>5</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 492.

<sup>6</sup>Romans 4:1-5

<sup>7</sup>Matthew 9:18-26