

On the Journey

Genesis 12: 1-9

Awake! Arise! The journey's begun!
We travel on together as one.
We know not where the road may lead,
but we move by faith, making love our creed.
As we follow, the journey is our home.

These are the lyrics to a song that describes life itself, especially the life of faith, as a journey. Life is characterized by the image of journey.

The Bible is full of journeys. The New Testament describes the missionary journeys of Paul. Certainly, Jesus took significant journeys in the wilderness, to Jerusalem, and finally to the cross.

The Hebrew Scriptures feature the journey of Israel from Babylonian exile to redemption and freedom. Before that, Israel followed Moses through the wilderness, from Egyptian slavery, to the Promised Land. These journeys did not happen all at once. They were not even, consistent, or methodical. The wilderness journey of the Israelites, for example, took forty years. That works out to an average of about 12 yards per day. Obviously, they didn't travel every day. They journeyed for a time, then settled down. Eventually, they picked up and moved on again. So are our own journeys.

The foundational biblical journey, the first big one, is the subject of today's scripture lesson. Abram, who would later be called Abraham, left home on a journey. (read Gen. 12: 1-9) And Abram "journeyed by stages to the Negeb". He and his people traveled a while, pitched their tents and stayed awhile, then pulled up stakes and traveled some more.

God told Abram to go. Go from your land. Go from your birthplace. Leave your father's house.

God invited Abram to come. Come to the land I will show you. I'm not showing it to you now, but come and I'll show you someday.

God promised to make Abram a great nation. "I'll bless you and make your name great." God said, "Be (you) a blessing!" The author of this part of Genesis has set up a fascinating connection. The promises of blessing to Abram are actually the flip side of the curses given to Adam and Eve. Now, there are blessings.

Abram represents the other side of Adam and Eve. They "left home" by being pushed out. Abram left home by choice and intent, at God's invitation. He heard the Almighty say, "when people relate to you, it will be as though they are relating to ME." In other words, you treat them as I would, as I am treating you.

Abram's journey led to many changes. His name was changed. His identity was changed. That's the way it is "on the journey."

When Abram and all the folks passed through Canaan, God said this is the Promised Land. At the time of Abram, some people called the Canaanites possessed

the land. They were called Canaanites presumably because this was their land. At the time of the writing of this passage, the Canaanites were no longer there.

For now, Abram and company moved on. Each time they moved on, they literally “pulled up [their] stakes”. And the passage closes charting Abram’s course through a series of successive encampments. They “journeyed by stages to the Negeb”.

Abram’s journey is a symbol for us. It reminds us of three things. First, all life journeys are taken by faith. Second, each particular journey is part of a larger journey. Third, the journey always lies before us.

Abram left home by faith. All life journeys are taken by faith. He followed what he perceived as God’s calling for his life. The geographical journey he took was only symbolic of the real journey, the journey of faith. The same is true for each of us. Whatever changes of location, the real journey of life is the faith journey. It is the journey of growth and discovering who we are. It is the journey of doing that unique task to which all our giftedness points.

Crossroads congregation is doing precisely this. We are stepping out by faith follow what we perceive as God’s call to be church, the call to be followers of Jesus today. It’s not the first time this congregation has stepped out. On this commitment Sunday, let us remember to remember that every phase of an authentic journey is always done by faith.

Each particular journey is part of a larger journey. God calls you and me. God calls this congregation. This is not a sign that we’re unique either individually or as a congregation. God is not calling just us to be on the journey. That seems to be what God does. Our being called does not mean we’re special or good enough, even though, of course, we are special and good enough.

God calls all people, all churches, all communities, and all nations to step out in faith and walk the walk. Our journey does not take place in isolation. My personal journey is tied now to the journey of Crossroads congregation. The same is true for you. Crossroads’ journey is likewise tied to the journey of all Christians and of all people of faith. What we do matters. Who we are matters because of the impact we will make. Our future is linked to the whole.

The vision we are blessed to have reminds us that our task, our mission, is part of God’s work to transform the world and its societies into the new creation that is being born.

God is God of all people and all that is. We journey with all who look to Abraham as patriarch: Jew, Muslims, Christians. We also journey with a wider circle of God’s children. Thanks be to God for those who journey with us. Thanks be to God for you, each of you. Your presence strengthens me on my journey. Your partnership makes our corporate journey more meaningful and rich. We encourage each other. Because of each other, we experience the love of God.

Our journey always lies before us. The creative work of being on the journey, of being a pilgrim, is ongoing. This is not a task to be accomplished and then laid aside to start something else. This is life work, the life work of personal transformation in cooperation with the indwelling Spirit. AND this is the life work of social transformation in cooperation, of us working together as a congregation, and in

cooperation with other Christians and non-Christians and the all-dwelling Spirit to shape the world towards God's peace and God's justice.

The journey is inward. The journey is outward. Each one of us must be on this journey in our own lives. Each congregation must be on this journey together to commit ourselves to building sacred community, doing justice, practicing compassion, and acting out Christ's love.

Abram packed up everything: relationships, possessions, and possibilities to follow God's call. He moved to a place and lived there for a while. Many of you know that I grew up in a military family. My dad was an Army chaplain and we moved every couple of years, sometimes more often. I attended a different school every year between 4th and 10th grade. Now, there were two kinds of families in the Army: those who unpacked the boxes and those who didn't. Those who didn't unpack, lived in each place with the expectation of moving on. They never seemed to live any place. My family unpacked. We lived in each place as though we would always live there. Families that unpack their boxes are happier, more fulfilled. They have more to give and give it more freely.

The journey of Crossroads has been by stages and will be by stages into the future. It is not specifically a journey of physical places, though there have been many. The step we are taking now is not primarily one of geography. The church house is symbolic of the next step in our journey.

It's tough to live in the ambivalence of the Spirit. Most of us want a little more clarity. We are striving to find the balance of finding a clear purpose within the ambivalence of being obedient to the promptings of the Spirit. In this, we have a lot in common with Abram.

I cannot see this congregation's future far down the road. What seems clear now, however, is this step we are taking. It is the step of commitment, of this body saying, "We intend to be a church not just for this present moment, but for years to come." There are never any guarantees about that. We recognize that life in the Spirit can involve hard choices and challenges, but our commitment and intention is to establish this congregation as a local expression of Christ's church according to our unique giftedness. Our goal is to affirm that this congregation is an expression of faith in God through Christ. Our prayer is to find a place, a building, in which to be church; a foundation from which to develop ministry; a facility through which to reach out, to work for justice, to worship God in powerful ways, to touch those who are hurting, and to help the larger church find its way in and into the 21st century. On this Commitment Sunday, we commit ourselves anew to be signs of the living Christ in the streets and neighborhoods from Kansas City to Guatemala, and from Mountain Top, TN to Wind River, WY.

We have a role to play and a task to do in the mission of being church, especially here in Kansas City. Our commitment has significance.

There is an old Christian tradition
That God sends each person into this world
With a special message to deliver,

With a special song to sing for others,
With a special act of love to bestow.
No one else can speak my message,
Or sing my song
Or offer my act of love.
These are entrusted only to me.

Once we find a building to reflect our commitment, this community of faith will be poised to respond even more effectively to whatever and wherever God sends us: the special message to deliver, the special song to sing for others, and the special act of love to bestow. No one else can speak our message or sing our song or offer our act of love. These are entrusted only to us.

I offer you this word of blessing and this prayer --
God of our past
Of our future
Of our journey
Call from us the gifts you have already given
So that we will live
to know ourselves more clearly
to let go of all that is not authentically Christ in us
to become filled with the Spirit
to know God more clearly
to follow Christ more nearly
to stand in the sacred space the creator hollows out for us
to know and embrace who we are, embraced and transformed by grace
to be what we profess to be and be it fully
to commune with the heaven that dwells deep within us listen inwardly for a
word to come
to write the poems we should write
to nurture the spontaneity and creativity with us
to stand in the freedom God gives us, on our own 200 feet, and cooperate with
the giver of life, the Spirit.
by whom, through whom, and in whom we pray. Amen