

Season after Pentecost
Call of Abraham
Narrative Lectionary Year 1, Week 2
September 14, 2014
Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD
Readings: Matthew 28: 19-20; Genesis 12: 1-9

Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit –Amen

Eighteen years ago, I was sitting in the early service at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio. The Genesis passage we heard this morning was the same passage I heard that day. I had been in Columbus attending a four-day workshop, lodging at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. Despite powerful denial, I had been “journeying by stages” on a long road toward seminary and pastoral ministry. I had been going along kicking and screaming - and I wasn’t done resisting. Before I drove eight hours home to Baltimore, Maryland, I thought I’d go to church. After the gospel was read, Pastor Al DeBelak stepped up to the pulpit and said, “The Lord said to Abram and Sarai, ‘Go’..... So Abram and Sarai went.” And he sat down.... and stayed seated..... for what seemed like..... a very long..... minute. At first I thought - “Well, **that’s** the shortest sermon I’ve ever heard.” But as that endless minute wore on - “God said ‘go!’ and they went” --- “God said ‘go!’ and they went” kept repeating in my head. And I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. God said “Go.....” I went home and gave my notice at work --- five months later, at forty-years old, I was taking my first class at Trinity Lutheran Seminary as an approved candidate for ordained ministry.

God is like that, you know. Extending invitations to places and possibilities unimagined. God seems particularly fond of approaching people in real or apparent darkness and hopelessness and offering them life- and light-giving opportunities. God did it with Abraham and Sarah. The Lord continues to come to you, to me, to Haven Lutheran Church, offering **us** a future filled with God’s promise. It may not mean a geographic relocation but another kind of change or dream. Who will stay and who will go? The LORD said to Abram and Sarai, ‘Go’.... So Abram and Sarai went.” What about us?

We can't escape the question by claiming Abraham and Sarah were just so much more devout and faithful than you or I. At this point in the story, that won't wash. If you look in earlier chapters of Genesis, you will read Abraham's family tree. You'll find out that Noah was Abraham's [8] great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather. You'll also realize it wasn't long after that Ark ride that the world was again populated with folks who seemed intent on going their own way, trying to build their own tower to the heavens, to be their own God. There is NO mention of Abraham or his more recent ancestors having ANY prior relationship with the LORD God who would approach Abraham with a wildly extravagant promise. It is **God** who initiates a relationship with Abraham. It's God who seeks out Abraham, not because he is particularly righteous or deserving, but because God is about God's work of loving, saving and bringing life.

In the way of Middle East thinking, Abraham and Sarah were a people without a future. They did not own land and had no children. Their family was about to arrive at a dead end. It seems an apt description also for the LORD's creation as it had unfolded from Eden to that point. God enters into Abraham and Sarah's hopelessness. God offers them a future. He promises them land, descendants and life with great meaning and purpose. "Go" is not a command or threat, it's an invitation and promise. Notice all the "I" pronouns in our reading, "I will show... I will make... I will bless you... I will.... I will" This future is all to be God's doing. God will create a future where humans, by their own efforts, could not have invented one.

Abraham and Sarah had to make a choice. Will they choose to live **into** God's promise, leaving behind their present lives, or live **against** the promise, holding on instead to the present order of things. It's no easy choice. You may be thinking Abraham

and Sarah had little to nothing to lose, but they did --- country, kindred, their father's homeland, all that was familiar and comfortable. And for what? The **possibility** of a new life with land, descendants and significance? This is a risk. Remember, we have no indication that Abraham had **any** relationship with the Lord who is making this promise, let alone a trusting one. Go or stay? Somehow, God's promise drew a response from this aging couple. Standing in God's grace-filled invitation, they found the courage to freely relinquish the past and present to embrace God's promised future. Abraham and Sarah would grow in faithfulness and loyalty to that Lord who had called them **as** they followed and lived in God's covenant. This God would prove again and again to have the power and will to keep promises and to create futures where there seemed no hope. The grace and promise of God would create faith in Abraham and Sarah as well as a future.

I believe eighteen years ago, the Lord was inviting me to "new life" Though I was slow to admit it, my ministry as Director of Education and Youth programs at Second English Lutheran Church had come to a dead-end - I was unchallenged, restless, my gifts weren't being used to their fullness and I had periodic bouts with depression. It took quite a while and much discomfort before I was able to let go of the security and comfort of my job, identity, hometown, family and friends in order to grab hold of God's unexplored vision of the future. Like Abraham and Sarah, I came to understand that **when** the Lord is calling, to **stay** in the safety of "life as it has always been" is simply to accept a kind of slow death. To risk to embrace God's promise, is to grab on to hope and to God's hand and future.

God's call to Abraham and Sarah nudges us to consider what it is each of us may be holding so tightly we can't hear or see God's invitation to something new and

rich and different from what we are expecting. As we eavesdrop on God's conversation with Abraham, God is speaking to us, whenever we face what seems like a dead end or an abyss of fear, unknown, or helplessness. When God speaks to Abraham, God is also asking us if we will allow our Lord to give us the courage to consider what grudges, habit, unhappiness, assumptions, weariness, materialism, busyness or worries you or I may be clutching so tightly that we can not open our lives to all God wants to offer us.

It's a risk to follow our Lord. But God is also taking a great risk. God decided to try to save, rescue, change the creation **we** corrupted through **us**. That was God's plan in calling Abraham and Sarah. Through them would come a people who would be called Israel. As Israel lived in relationship with God, they were to reflect God's light that would draw others toward God and God's ideal for creation. As Abraham and Sarah's descendants followed and lived God's ways, others too would learn of the one true God, who loved them fiercely and would want to know more. God makes it very clear that this calling and promise of God was never meant to start an exclusive club. God says. "...and in you **all** the families of the earth shall be blessed." God's eyes have always been set on inviting, saving, loving ALL people, all of creation. It may start with one seemingly hopeless, elderly couple but it's God's intention to reach all people through faithful followers and it still is today. The LORD who came to Abraham and who came to us in Jesus is about the business of inviting and calling us to life-giving possibilities. We may only see aging bodies, declining numbers in the pew, an ineffective political system, frightening global tensions. But God has other possibilities and new life to offer us. It has nothing to do with our "worthiness" --- it has everything to do with who God is. God is about life - life in its everlasting fullness. Our God is shameless and determined to have all creation move toward a future where life is boundless with love, fulfillment and peace. To what future filled with God's promise is God calling you, me, Have Lutheran Church? "The Lord said to Abram and Sarai, 'Go'..... So Abram and Sarai went..... journeying by stages." Where is God calling you or me right now? To what is

God calling our congregation? Give us the courage to trust God and “Go forth in the darkness and put our hands into the hand of God, which shall be better than a light and safer than a known way.” Amen

--Linda M. Alessandri

