

The ABCs of Abraham's Faith Journey
Genesis 12: 1-9
First in the series "Faith Journeys"
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First Federated Church
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A Rabbi once wrote:

Birth is a beginning
And Death a destination
But Life is a journey,
A going-a growing
From stage to stage.
From Childhood to Maturity
And Youth to Age.
From Innocence to Awareness
And Ignorance to Knowing;
From Foolishness to Discretion
And then perhaps to Wisdom.
From Weakness to Strength
Or Strength to Weakness--
And often back again.
From Health to Sickness
And back, we pray, to Health again.
From Offense to Forgiveness,
From Loneliness to Love,
From Joy to Gratitude,
From Pain to Compassion,
And Grief to Understanding--
From Fear to Faith.
From Defeat to Defeat--
Until, looking backward or ahead,
We see that Victory lies
Not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the Journey,
Stage by stage
A sacred pilgrimage.
Birth is the beginning

And Death a destination
But Life is a journey,
A sacred pilgrimage
Made stage by stage--
From Birth to Death
To Life Everlasting.

This morning we begin a year long sermon series exploring Faith Journeys. Each one of us is on a journey of faith in Life, whether we know it or not. We can gain insights into our own journey by examining the journeys of those who have gone before us. We will begin with Genesis--the book of Beginnings--and conclude with the Gospel of John.

Over the next few weeks we will look at Abraham's Faith Journey. It begins in a land called Haran. Listen for the Word of God as we read from Genesis 12.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you, I will curse. And by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and the persons that they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. Thence he removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed on, still going on toward the Negeb.

There are three simple "movements" in this text. I call them the ABC's of Abram's Faith Journey.

First there is Activity. *Go.* Abram *had* to do something. He *had* to respond to the call of God. Abram had to leave behind old ways of doing things. He had to leave behind his comfort zone; his country, his kindred, his father's house. In

other words, he could not utter the 7 words of a dying faith community; “But we’ve never done it that way” or “That’s not the way its done here.”

As a kid I used to like jumping the ditches along Farmington Road. Back then they were fairly deep and often filled with water. I learned, by watching and by experience, that you cannot jump half-way across a ditch. You cannot hold back. You cannot leave one foot behind as a safety net.

I love the story of Cortez when he set off across Mexico. Upon landing on the shores of Mexico he had his men burn their ships. In other words, he was saying, “There’s no going back.”

In our faith journeys the first word that God speaks to us is “Go.” “Behold, I am doing a new thing...” (Isaiah 43:19)

Abram had to do something. He had to leave the familiar in order to go to the place that God promised.

In doing so, he discovered the “B” of his Faith Journey; Blessing. *I will bless you, and ...you will be a blessing. ... by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.*

The repetition of the word “blessing” is neither accidental or coincidental but theological. God will bless Abraham by being with him throughout his Faith Journey. God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants is personified by Jesus when, in His Great Commission, He promised *Lo, I will be with you, even unto the close of the Age.*

Furthermore, God’s blessing of Abraham is not an end in and of itself. God blesses Abraham so Abraham can bless all the people of the earth.

Put a little differently, one of the tenets of our faith is that we have been “saved to serve.” In the words of Paul, we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. (Philippians 2: 12-13) Abraham’s blessing from God is only manifested in so far as Abraham is a blessing to others.

That is true for us too. In our Faith Journeys God blesses us with the Holy Presence. We will never walk alone. And our job, our calling, is to live lives that are a blessing to others. By doing this, we glorify God.

The third element, the “C” of the ABCs of Abraham’s faith journey, is Commitment. Abraham responded to God’s blessing and the responsibility that came with it by building an altar. In other words, he worshipped the Author of his blessing. In our Faith Journeys we need to commit, to make time for worship.

A little over a century ago Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote of a little plant in the garden of his soul called “Reverence.” He noted that he had to consciously nurture it. We do, too.

Not too long ago a man was talking to me about a service club of which we are both members. He rarely misses. I seldom attend. He told me that he never had the problem because he planned his schedule around a Noon meeting each Thursday. I believe that God speaks to us through the ordinary circumstances of life. It struck me like a thunderbolt that that is true of each one of us. We need to schedule, not as an after-thought, but as a first-thought, worship with God. We may think that we do not need it but maybe someone else needs our presence on a particular Sunday. They may need our insight, our laughter. Now, if this gathering of disciples does not feed your spirit, then, please for your sake and for God's sake, find one that does.

As for me, I am paid to be here at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning. As a New Year's resolution to clear time for my service club or to find a new one.

Commitment to our spiritual nourishment not only involves worship but other spiritual disciplines; prayer, devotions, study, fellowship, service. As a community of faith we had a chance to serve last week through a new "Go and Serve" program as we went to the Midwest Food Bank. If you are not involved in a study group--the Sunday morning Sunday School class or Tuesday morning Women's Bible Study, you can join one in the next few weeks; either a Sunday evening study of Philippians or a book study of Barbara Brown Taylor's *An Altar in the World*.

If you are not part of a fellowship, feel free to talk to Daren or I about how you start a small group for a long-term or short-term commitment.

This week we will put a "Faith Journey Wall" up in one of the hallways of our Christian Education wing. You are invited to write brief notes about your faith journey on that wall--to inspire others or to simply share how God has touched your life.

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To God be the Glory. Amen.