

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
JULY 6, 2008

Genesis 12:1-5

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." 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. He took his wife Sarai, 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.

John 1:35-43

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

I always wonder as I read the Biblical stories what the people involved

thought or felt. It is easy for us to forget that people like Abraham, Philip, and Peter were just like us. Now, when we look back at those stories that had been told and retold countless times, even before they were written down, we read them with such an expectation of piousness and holiness that we stop looking at the characters of the story as human and stop wondering what precisely was taking place. The stories of the call of Abraham and the call of disciples are perfect examples of this.

Since Abraham is considered the founder of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it is appropriate to start our consideration with him. As far as we know, he had had no contact or personal involvement with the one true God, or any other gods, before the call account in Genesis 12.

Consider his situation. Abraham heard a voice, either audibly, booming from the heavens, or internally, prickling his conscience. This voice called him to leave his home, most of his family, and all of his familiar surroundings. He was to depart for some as yet unidentified place by some as yet unknown route.

Abraham had none of the things we would consider vital for such a journey. He had no Mapquest directions, no AAA Trip-Tik, and no Rand McNally to guide him. He was not advised about the best way to travel. He was not warned about delays he might encounter or construction snafus along the way. He did not know about the gas stations, restaurants, rest rooms and rest stops along his route.

As bad as making this trek into the unknown might be, the situation was actually going to get worse for him. You see, Abraham had to convince Sarah, his wife, that he knew what he was doing and knew where he was going. I suspect that took some doing.

I can imagine the conversation with Abraham saying, "Honey, I heard a voice from the sky today telling me to leave town with all of my immediate family and possessions and go to a new place to live, though I do not really know where this new place is." Of course, Sarah had to re-

spond, "Husband, you must be crazy. Who, or what, was this voice?" The reply, "I am not really sure, but I think it was the one true God; you know, the one who rules over all people on earth." Sarah must have continued the scornful and disbelieving interrogation, "And where is our new home going to be and how long will it take us to reach the place?" Abraham's answer could not reassure Sarah for he frankly did not know.

Despite all this, certainly not because of it, Abraham and Sarah went. As the writer of Hebrews expressed it, Abraham obeyed and went, even though he did not know much. He did not know where, precisely, he was going. He did not know what course his journey would take. He did not know what to expect when he arrived. That was faith.

The early group of disciples also responded to the call with a remarkable faith. These men and women had a history of knowing about the work of God in the lives of their ancestors. They had heard the stories of Adam, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Moses, and of the Israelites in the Promised Land. They knew about God and God's work, and they knew God. In this, they had an advantage over Abraham.

From John's gospel, we heard the story of how those earliest of disciples heard the call of God. As they were going about their lives, a man walked by, looked at them, and said, "Follow me." Remarkably, they did.

In that initial response to the call of Jesus, these men and women had no idea where their journey would take them. Had they been able to see where they were ultimately headed, I would bet they would not have taken that first step.

While those early followers of Jesus were folks just like us, there was a remarkable thing about them. This was their willingness to conceive of God in a new and different way. There was nothing in their history to prepare them for the reality they experienced of God sending one like Jesus. Never before would they have imagined that one whom they be-

lieved to be God's son would die on a cross. The early church had to change their way of understanding God's work in the world in order to respond to God's new call. And they did.

You may have wondered about the title of the sermon for today. At the risk of offending all of you, let me tell the origin of the title. Most of you know that Vicki and I have a dog. Mollie is a Dachshund and Jack Russell Terrier mix. Vicki got her from an animal shelter in Georgia about a month before Vicki was diagnosed with breast cancer. We have a code when she knows that I am ready to play with her. I look at her and say, "Here we go." Mollie does not know precisely what is getting ready to happen, but she is excited by the prospects, whatever they may be. For both Abraham and the disciples, it was like God looked at them and said, "Here we go." They did not know precisely what was getting ready to happen, but they were excited by the prospects, whatever they may be.

That is where we are today. We know we are starting our journey together as pastor and people. We have entered into a covenant relationship with one another. We travel in cooperation, side by side, arm in arm, as minister and congregation, as a gathered people of God on the journey toward the destination to be God's church in this place. Neither one of us, though, knows precisely what is going to happen in the years ahead. Yet, we should both be excited by the prospects ahead.

We must express the faith of both Abraham and the early church. We must be willing, together, to be obedient to God even when we do not know all the answers. Like Abraham, we may be called to a place that we do not know or is unfamiliar to us or is uncomfortable for us. Like the disciples, we need to be able to change our way of thinking about God, recognizing that God will often do a new thing with us and through us to reach out to people. To be the people whom God has called to be on journey, we have to exhibit these kinds of faith together.

I have spoken of the journey that we are starting. We must remember

that we have to make a conscious commitment to begin the journey, or we will not go anywhere together. At some point in the process, we may find that we have taken a wrong turn or two and have to get back on track. That will be alright. We must also remember that we are **on a journey** to our final goal; we are not there yet. We will not reach our destination instantly; it will take time. And, we know it will demand hard work on our part.

Dear people of God, our together journey begins. Here we go. May we commit our lives to the continuation of what God has called us to be and to do. AMEN.