

LENT 2 ~ **February 17, 2008** ~ Annual Congregational Meeting

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; 2 Corinthians 9: 6-9; John 3:1-17

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. 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 the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

AS WE JOURNEY IN FAITH WE ARE GOING SOMEWHERE...

You all know Abram and Sarai right? They are the couple God calls to go from the known to the unknown – the ones who get their names changed to Abraham and Sarah later in the story – the old folks who end up with a child and become the parents of us all. In fact, Abraham is of significance for the followers of three world religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – because it is believed that it is God who called and inspired and led Abraham on a path to save the people who had gone wrong and disobeyed God.

One of the main things that we know about Abram and Sarai at the beginning of Genesis 12 is that they are unable to have children. They are representative of the barrenness of human history and that emptiness is a metaphor for hopelessness. Yet it is through this couple – these past childbearing, infertile folks – that God's promise of life is fulfilled.

I think sometimes that many of us look around our congregation and our denomination – around the Christian church generally – and see it as barren or comatose. Are we just old and no longer able to create new life? Has the lack of children – the absence of offspring – caused us to give up hope of a vibrant future? If we see ourselves as barren and hopeless, how can we be faithful to God's promise?

Abram is told to get up and leave his homeland, his family, everything familiar and comfortable. And the amazing thing is that he does it! What courage he must have! Can we see ourselves on a similar journey of faith or are we bound by places, people, property and purse?

Abram and Sarai enter a new history that begins with a call and a radical breaking away from the old history. They are invited to leave their secure barrenness for the sake of a risky future. It seems counter intuitive just when things are settled and predictable to relinquish control – our natural instinct is to do the opposite – to hold on to things as they are for dear life. Yet God calls and promises something more, something new.

This call from God subverts much usual wisdom for it is a call to move beyond three very human, powerful and deeply rooted fears – the unknown that we cannot control, those who are different from us, and personal powerlessness in the face of seeming impossibilities.

God calls Abram and Sarai to leave their geographic place. They leave all custom and comfort, family and friends, all the regularity and rhythm of their shared life. Abram and Sarai journey from what they have to what they do not have, from the known to the unknown, from everything that is familiar to all things strange.

They also have to leave behind their narrow, small-minded, parochial vision – the tendency in all of us to exclude the strange and the stranger. Our common inclination is to fear the other – to suspect and marginalize the strange – to dismiss all that is different from who and what we know. God calls Abram and Sarai – calls us – to a universal and inclusive embrace of everyone.

Abram and Sarai are both about seventy-five years old when God calls them and while they might not have had our knowledge of the biology of human reproduction, they know full well that they are beyond their child-bearing years. They face an impossibility that brings them face to face with their own powerlessness to alter their circumstances. Biologically-speaking, barren Sarai and impotent Abram are “as good as dead.” However they believe that God has the power to fulfill divine promises – they move from fear of powerlessness to faith that God can truly make something out of nothing.

When God calls, Abram and Sarai challenge conventional wisdom and move beyond what might be normal and understandable human fears – ignorance, inclusion, and impotence. Why do they go? Not because it is the easiest thing to do, but because God intends for them to do it.

God lays out a vision and a promise which Abram and Sarai find compelling enough to take risks for. As a church, perhaps that is also what we need to do – to listen for and believe the compelling vision that God has for where we are going. Then as a community of faith we will find the courage to take risks as we journey where God calls. **Amen.**