

Go to be a Blessing

- [Genesis 12:1-4a](#)

Just a few verses in the first reading today, but such important ones. One commentator says, “It would be hard to over-estimate the value of [Abram’s] call... here begins God’s plan to bring redemption to the world.”¹ Abram’s father had set out from Ur in the Chaldees to go to Canaan but only got as far as Haran, which was probably in southeast Turkey. Then the great story of the Hebrew people begins with these few lines. “The LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country...So Abram went, as the LORD had told him.”

God spoke to Abram apparently without any warning. There is no indication that Abram and his family were believers – there wasn’t even a category of believer or non-believer. We don’t know what happened before God suddenly said to Abram, “Go”, and Abram went.

Author Thomas Cahill² has argued that this is the beginning of human understanding of history as a sequence of unfolding events moving forward in time. Prior to Abram, he says, the ancient peoples saw life as an endless cycle of birth and death, but when Abram heard God, he began a journey in which actions have consequences and the ideas of linear time and history were born.

Abram was a young man at this point. I tend to think of Abraham as an old guy with a long white beard, a bit like Moses, but he was a young man when he set out on his epic journey. A journey which reverberates through the millennia, and influences our lives today as one of the founding stories which Jesus knew inside and out and which were woven into the very fabric of his teaching and ministry.

¹ NET Bible, Full notes edition, 2019, p.28

² Cahill, Thomas: The Gifts of the Jews

I wonder how young Abram heard God? Was it a voice, or an inkling, was it a desire that later he looked back on and said, “of course, God called me”? And was this the first time he had heard God speak? And how did he know which way to go when God just said “Go from your country...”?

Abram went on faith that God was truly speaking to him and that God would show him the way. And this has become a model for our own journeying, our own pilgrimage towards the land that God has promised us, the coming fully manifest reign of God. And what does God promise? That Abram will be a blessing – because God covenants with him, all those who align with him will also find themselves blessed.

Abram is to leave his country, his kindred and his father’s house; and God’s covenant is that he will bless him, make him well-known and the patriarch of a great nation, that Abram may be a blessing. God is calling to St Benedict’s today to continue the journey that we have started. To leave behind things that are familiar and comfortable, that feel like home and family and go towards the land that God will show us.

This is not easy. It’s not easy to think that we must leave behind some of the things we hold dear, but that is always the way in the spiritual path. Actually, it’s the way of life in the secular world as well. Change happens. Again and again, we leave behind a situation that has been comfortable and we move to a new situation and just as we have adjusted and feel that once again these are the good days of our life, we find that we need to change or that things are changing around us. Sometimes we can say, “God told me” and other times we look back and say I had no idea that God was calling me but look what happened.

Back in 1987, it was very clear to me that God was telling me to move to the States. At the time I was part of the leadership of a spiritual community in Scotland but not feeling called to continue;

my then partner, Robin, wanted to be nearer to her family in Virginia; and we had made a deep friendship with some women who live in the Blue Ridge and my heart wanted to be close to them. And then I heard a speaker say something like, “If God is telling you to move to a different country, you had better pay attention.” It was clearly a God thing.

But when Robin ended our relationship some five years later, I did not hear God speaking to me. Yet as I looked at my situation and prayed I clearly heard two things. The first was that it was time to see if I had a calling to the priesthood, and the second was the phone ringing. It was Jill calling to reconnect. And so I came out to California to see her, fell in love, moved to Los Osos because St Ben’s had a woman priest, discovered that I had settled in one of the dioceses most friendly to gay people, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Looking back, I can say with confidence that Robin leaving me was the best thing that could have happened. But it did not feel like it at the time. At the time, I was devastated.

We don’t know how Abram felt about leaving his country, his kindred and his father’s house and of course the Biblical record does not even mention his wife Sarai. I wonder how Sarai felt? Was this something that she felt excited about, or was it just Abram’s crazy idea? Did she grieve leaving her home and all that was familiar to become a nomad?

I know that on the surface my leaving does not feel like a good thing to most of us. I am sure that it is the right thing for me and so I am sure that in the divine economy it is also the right thing for St Ben’s.

Yet things have changed since the pandemic. We are smaller in number, people have moved away, fewer new people have joined us. We have aged. We do not have a Sunday musician. We are not getting together so much in person for the good conversations we

had in the past. Things are different. On the positive side, we have finally finished the building, we have nearly repaid the loan which once seemed so overwhelming, we have learned to meet and pray and support one another on-line, we have Deacon Jen with their positive energy and the intention of creating a church for the future, and we still enjoy each other's company, mostly.

There is grief for all of us in this time of change and it is important that we acknowledge that. It is different for each one; some of us will feel less like coming to church, others will find things which always irritated them irritating them a lot more. I don't know how it will be for you. But I welcome conversations with you about it, and about anything else you would like to consider together.

I also recommend that you talk to each other.

Abram was told to leave and he did not know where he was going. We don't know where St. Benedict's will be in five years. But we do know that if we pay attention God is leading us. One of the ways we pay attention is by sharing our hopes and fears, our inklings and knowings. Because God speaks to us in many ways and particularly through each other, through praying and reading Scripture together.

God's covenant was that God would bless Abram and make him a blessing. That covenant is also God's with the people of St. Benedict's. God longs to continue to make us a blessing to one another and to the community of Los Osos and beyond. God longs to bless the planet through our faithfulness.

And God is already doing that. God blesses the planet through the service we give God and our neighbor; through Earthcare, through the Abundance Shop, through Los Osos Cares, through Laundry Love, through Community Dinners and People's Kitchen, and through the myriad ways each one of you touches the people around you. Every loving smile you give, every prayer you say, is a blessing.

The God who calls us to leave safety and go where she calls is also the God who blesses abundantly.

I am going to close with a blessing written by Jan Richardson for World Communion Sunday.

And the Table Will Be Wide

And the table
will be wide.
And the welcome
will be wide.
And the arms
will open wide
to gather us in.
And our hearts
will open wide
to receive.

And we will come
as children who trust
there is enough.
And we will come
unhindered and free.
And our aching
will be met
with bread.
And our sorrow
will be met
with wine.

And we will open our hands
to the feast
without shame.
And we will turn
toward each other

without fear.
And we will give up
our appetite
for despair.
And we will taste
and know
of delight.

And we will become bread
for a hungry world.
And we will become drink
for those who thirst.
And the blessed
will become the blessing.
And everywhere
will be the feast.

– Jan Richardson