

A sermon preached at Zion Episcopal Church
The 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, Year A
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Abram was 75 years old when he was called by God to start a new thing. He was told, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” Abram did not know where he was going, or why he was going, only that God had spoken to him. And so, he would go. Abram’s faith is astonishing. Most of us prefer to go in the direction of safe, secure, and predictable. We prefer not vague promises, but guaranteed contracts and refund clauses if we are not satisfied with outcomes. But Abram responded to God fully -without being certain of the results.

The story of Abram has, to be sure, many problematic elements. Most notably, this story, written approximately 3,500 years ago, has been used to justify -among other things- slavery, colonization, cultural genocide and blind obedience to faith leaders. But it is useful for us in that it can show us that God isn’t finished with us, and has plans for humankind.

For one thing, God is not satisfied with how far we have come on our journey to walk in God’s ways. We have much further to go before God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus too, said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, you will be guided into all the truth.”

The Holy Spirit was sent - to be with us, to inspire us, and to light a fire under us- and get us moving again in the right direction. Theologian Daniel B. Clendenin wrote that the story of God’s call to Abram is one that is given to each one of us. He says it is a call to move beyond three deeply human and unusually powerful fears— fear of the unknown and things we can’t control, fear of others who are different from us, and the fear of powerlessness in the face of impossibilities.

In spite of these fears, Abram set out with the promises of God ringing in his ears-the promise that he would have children and become a great nation, and the promise that he would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Abram had a formidable task ahead of him; to leave everything he knew, everything that was comfortable, familiar, and habitual. He needed to leave family and friends and venture to a place with a different language, culture, and customs. At 75 years old and, let’s face it- probably set in his ways, Abram is offered new possibilities, a new life and a new purpose.

Now, change is not something most of us are comfortable with- There's even a joke about how many Episcopalians it takes to change a light bulb. 10 comes the answer, one to change the bulb and the other 9 to talk about how much they liked the old one. But change we must, if we truly want to be a blessing to all people. Over the centuries, humankind has had to change, and the church with it. In our country, we have eradicated slavery and we need to keep working to eliminating racism. We have legalized same-sex marriage and we need to keep working on eliminating homophobia. We still have much to do -to be reconciled with God, with each other, and with all of creation. In order to be in harmony, we will need to leave behind many things with which we have become accustomed and comfortable. We have become accustomed to the increase in sarcasm and hatred towards those who differ from us which has resulted in more violent interactions. We have become so comfortable with the use of fossil fuels which has resulted in climate change, sea level rise, and increased drought and wildfires.

How can we begin to take on all that is facing humanity in our day? Let's return once more to Abram, who was soon to become Abraham, the father of many nations and faiths. First, Abraham believed in God's promises. In the book of Romans, we hear, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" He believed that God would guide his steps and show him the ways in which he should go. He believed that God would bring new life to his family and his people.

Second, Abraham believed that through his actions, he would become a blessing to all people. How can we encourage and include all people in our efforts to do those things that God would have us do? How can we be a blessing to those around us?

Of course, the most important thing Abraham did was GO. He couldn't see the whole way before him. But he started out in faith. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said "You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." One step and then another and another.

Where might God be leading us? This fall, we will have the opportunity to participate in an exciting discernment project called 'Re-imagining Church.' Zion was chosen by Yale Divinity School to be paired with a facilitator who will lead a small group in wondering about where God would have us go.

In the meantime, we can be praying, listening for God's still small voice, and taking the steps that we can towards the vision for humanity that God has set before us: a world reconciled to God and one another and all creation. God promises new life, resurrected life. Even when things

may seem to be past their prime, even when things appear to be dead. In God there is always hope for good things to come. With God there is blessing for all people. Amen.