

Called to Go

[Genesis 12:1-4a; John 20:19-22](#)

Rev. Eunice T. McGarrahan
Sunday, September 18, 2005
Worship at 9 and 11 a.m.

You have by now noticed that the sermon title is "Called to Go." Since this is my last Sunday, the title does seem like the sermon is about me, but if you were to think that, you would be wrong. It's about you...it's all about you.

Let us pray: God of all, as we face a future in which change is certain, may we hear in this moment your steadfast word which never changes. For the sake of Christ our Lord. Amen.

When Abraham gets this call from God, he is already on the move. The call to Abraham to go to a new place does not come as a bolt out of the blue. He had lived about seventy miles south of Baghdad, but for unknown reasons, his father had uprooted them all and moved out of the "cradle of civilization" – well, that's what our 9th grade history books called it, right?

But the first eleven chapters of Genesis are not interested in the cradle of civilization. Rather, they tell us that in creating that civilization, all that humanity did with God's good creation was to overstep its bounds on every front. Some cradle. The last straw in this sordid history was the building of the tower of Babel – a monumental effort to build a lasting memorial to that most popular god of all – us!

Abraham thus is already restless and heading away from the big city and the center of power.

He's at a point in life that we recognize. Most of us get there at one time or another. There is nothing in his past life that holds out any promise. He is disconnected from the community in which he grew up. His father has died, so his place in life is not only changed and a little more lonely, it also now feels very mortal. This is when the word of the Lord comes to him.

And what does it say? First God tells him to go to a destination to be named later. This does not sound very reassuring to us. We are the people who have invented On-Star and Mapquest. We want to know where we're going. Not having a road map or a computer print-out of detailed directions is almost un-American

With that uncertain direction, God then tells Abraham that he will bless him and that through him, all the families of the earth will be blessed. That's a good promise, because at that moment all the families of the earth were in disarray and confusion. Regardless of strides they had made in technology, law and political organization, they were scattered, disunited and working at cross-purposes, to the point of wars and rumors of war. Now, does any of this sound familiar?

It is not just in this context that God calls Abraham out of one place to go to another. It is because of this human dilemma that God calls Abraham. This is God's response to the sin and evil that is so pervasive among all the families of the earth. In fact, this is always God's response to the human predicament. When people ask, "Why doesn't God do something about this?" God replies, "I am doing something...I'm sending you." I thought about this earlier this week when I saw a New York Times headline about how churches were reacting so quickly to Katrina. It said, "Disaster Relief Gives New Meaning to Organized Religion." It's good to see 'organized religion' get good press.

And just so, God calls Abraham – a man in a specific time and place and he promises to bless him. As we have said so many times in the recent past, this blessing is none other than the steadfast presence of God in Abraham's life. But that blessing is not to be hoarded. Abraham is not being singled out for privilege, nor will his life be free from suffering. He is being called and blessed so that through him, all the families of the earth will be blessed. Because God walks with Abraham and Abraham walks with God, others will also experience the presence of God in their lives.

One way Abraham will bless succeeding generations is by being an example to follow. Abraham shows us that it is possible to hear God's word and to follow it. Now we have to admit that Abraham and Sarah both are examples of what it means to live in fear, forgetting that God is present. But, they also show us what it means to trust God and God's promises, even when it seems that God is far away and that the word of God is just that – words.

But, as John Calvin has said, Abraham is not just an example of blessing, he is the cause of blessing because Abraham is the ancestor of Jesus. It is through Abraham that Jesus comes into the world. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the blessing for all the families of the earth. For in Jesus, God is truly with us in a way we can see and understand. But there is so much more.

Just as Christ came into the world through Abraham because he trusted God, so Christ will come to the world through you.

And this is a world that needs Jesus. This is a world that needs a Savior because it is broken and it can't fix itself. Oh, we can do many things to help alleviate the brokenness. We can write and enforce laws to restrain the lawless. We can establish treaties to try to keep peace among the nations. We can search for cures for ravaging diseases. We can develop therapies trying to heal our emotions and broken relationships. Many of you are doing such work, pushing back the forces of darkness.

But all of this necessary work just treats the symptoms of a much deeper and enduring problem – human sin. Our sin, our turning away from God has damaged the whole creation and we all live with its effects. What we need is someone to save us -- not from economic or political insecurity -- we need someone to save us from sin. And there is good news for us. That's exactly what Jesus was

sent into the world to do. Jesus is the One who does take away the sin of the world. The world desperately needs to know that and so we are called by God to take that good news into all of God's world.

Lesslie Newbigin, a British missionary to India has said that church in its words and work "offers to all peoples a vision of the goal of human history in which good is affirmed and its evil forgiven and taken away; a vision which makes it possible to act hopefully when there is no earthly hope and to find the way when everything is dark and there are no earthly landmarks."

Certainly in the past few weeks, we have seen great hopelessness, darkness and few markers showing us the way to a good future. And it is in this context and because of this context that God calls us and sends us into the world as it is.

But we're not sent on our own. The passage that we read from the Gospel of John shows us how we go into the world. This event occurs right after the resurrection and the disciples are filled with doubt and fear. It is at that moment that Jesus just shows up and breathes the Holy Spirit on them. This gives them life – new life. This is just like when God breathed into the clay and Adam became a living, real human being! And in that same encounter, Jesus simply says, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you." It sounds simple, but think about it: just how did the Father send Jesus?

Well, first of all, he sent Jesus as the word made flesh. God's word is more than words – God's word does what it says. God's word lives and breathes in the world in Jesus. So the words of Jesus are the words of God and the acts of Jesus are the very acts of God. Jesus was sent by God – and we are sent in the same way – to speak God's words, to do God's works, and to lay down his life. It was kind of fine up until the part about laying down one's life, wasn't it?

But that's what Jesus did. He laid down his life in order to take away the sin of the world. It seems a weak and strange antidote. How will such a message make sense? Again, Newbigin has a suggestion: "How is it possible," he asks, "that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power that has the last word on human suffering is represented by a man hanging on a cross?...The only answer is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it."

And live by it. St. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, describes what living by it would look like: Think about what we have in Christ: the encouragement he has brought us, the comfort of God's love, our sharing in his Spirit, and the mercy and kindness he has shown us. If you enjoy these blessings, then do what will make my joy complete. Agree with each other and show your love for each other. Be united in your goals and in the way you think. In whatever you do, don't let selfishness or pride be your guide. Be humble and honor others more than yourselves. Don't be interested only in your own life, but care about the lives of others too. In your life together, think and act like Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2: 1-5, Today's English Version)

That's what 'living by the Gospel' looks like.

Called to go? It is all about you...each of you and all of you together. We have been touched by the unimagined grace of Jesus. That's not something we can keep to ourselves. God the Father could not keep Jesus to himself. He sent him out into the world as the embodiment of grace. And so, as we are sent into the world just like Jesus, may we be a people who live tangibly and visibly in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, pointing people to a hope that will never fade.

Let us pray. Grant us, O Lord, a humble sense that we have been blessed by you. And grant us as well, hearts and wills to embody your grace in our words and work so that others will see Jesus and find hope in this world and the next. Amen.