

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
Second Sunday in Lent
Sunday, March 1, 2026**

**“Embrace the Call”
Genesis 12:1-4**

Guest Preacher Margaret McGugan

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. “So, Abram went as the Lord had told him and Lot, his nephew, went with him. Abram took his wife Sarai and all their possessions that they had gathered and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan.”

To begin, I would like you to visualize this event of gathering everything you own, your extended family...which in itself could be challenging since family members live in many parts of the world; your clothing, jewelry, photos, your art collection, maybe the heirloom wool rug from your grandparent’s home; food, bottled water, medications, perhaps a generator and fuel to run the generator, your computer, iPhone, charging devises, a BBQ, and beloved pets. Perhaps shelter, like a tent, because you do not know where you are going, or how long it will take to get there, wherever ‘there’ is, and God did not forward any reservations at the Holiday Inn or Camp KOA. So, it would be good to be prepared. You are leaving behind your home, your land, and your security. God did not even provide a directional map highlighting the route. You have nothing to go on except God telling you to go and that God will guide you. Do we go? Do we trust God completely?

Abram and Sarai went. They gathered up the vessels of food and water, cooking pots, the tents and tent poles, household servants and slaves, shepherds, sheep, and goats. The coordination of this move is beyond imagination, unless you are a strategic planner who loves to organize people and things. The storyteller sums it up neatly by saying, ‘so, Abram went as the Lord had told him.’ There is nothing neat or easy about this ‘going’ especially when you are trying to move people and animals in the same line of direction. And what was Sarai thinking when Abram announced their going to an unknown place. We can only imagine her reaction.

Abram, you heard a voice and we are now going to a land this voice will lead us to and only it knows the place we are going, and you have an urge to obey. Did you remind this voice of our ages. Did you mention how comfortable we are where we are in our lives? And, we have no son to start this new nation. Do you think a son could be a pivotal point to this calling? Abram could have told God that it was impossible to go away from his father’s house, since he was the elder son and the next patriarch and his ancestral duty was to his father, Terah. It would have been a disgrace for Abram to leave.

And besides all that, it was dangerous to travel far from your homeland. There were no rules that one could count on and no embassy to call if one got into trouble. But God has plans for Abram and Sarai. Plans that led them over hills and vales, crisscrossing rivers, and mountains. A famine led the couple to Egypt only to have their lives threatened when Abram lies about his wife, or was it his sister, to Pharoah. They travel into unknown territory and warring people, and they had to deal with land disputes. It took years and generations to finally get to Canaan.

No, this is not a leisurely walk in the park. This is a commitment, a life commitment. All we hear as listeners, is that Abram will be a blessing and his name will be great among people. But nowhere does it say, he will be materially better off. In fact, it is almost certain, when he leaves behind his homeland, he leaves his reputation, his people, his knowledge of places and terrain - his life will be a challenge not only for himself, but for his family.

Yet he goes. He goes to pastor people. He goes to nurture a new way of thinking. He is to build a new identity of the creator God and out of this new thinking and identity, Abram and his descendants with God's help, will create a new people, a new nation as a blessing to God.

This is a new reality of God for these nomads who have lived on the stories of their ancestors. God will become all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present everywhere God reigns. And better still, God will be alive in people and through people. Abram had no reason not to go. His father Terah died in Haran, leaving him free from primal obligations.

But whether Abram had reason to go was not the primary reason God picked him for this call. God chose Abram not because Abram worshiped God. In fact, Abram worshipped the idols his father worshipped. God chose Abram because Abram was righteous and he accepted this inner urge that motivated him to respond and to meet God for the first time on God's terms. Abram showed a desire to please God much like Noah, Abram's distant relative who did everything God commanded him. Through Noah's faithful life, we have been blessed with God's grace to last our lifetime.

I wonder if Abram heard the story of Noah and his obedience to God over a campfire that echoed God's promise to Noah - 'I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you.' I wonder if Abram recognized the voice of God as the same voice Noah heard and felt confident to go where the voice led him. No questions asked. If the creator God can establish a new life to Noah's people, then God can do it again with Abram's people. And if God can bring a new nation into being through Abram's descendants, then God can bring eternal life to us through the life and death of God's only Son, Jesus. On faith alone, we are blessed with abundant life.

With this godly urge pushing Abram forward, his family sojourned across the lands embracing God as they traveled as strangers and aliens, always moving toward Canaan in stages of faith. Abram and Sarai did not see the promise of Genesis 12 for themselves. They did it for their descendants. For their children. They did it for descendants they would never see.

We are the descendants that Abram never saw. We are the new voice of hope and of righteousness and of love in this world. We are carrying forward the call from our ancestors to our children and grandchildren. Wherever Abram stopped for the night, there he met the voice of God edging him on, encouraging him to continue. Every altar he built, there God was rooted in the foreign land, every person Abram met, there God was rooted in that life.

Abram's name became great among the nations as the apostle Paul mentions in our reading of Romans because "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." I wonder if it is difficult for us to find hope and righteousness in a time when tyranny seems powerful. When God seems silent. When the road map we hold in our hands is blurred with tears. Is there an expiry date on hope? Is righteousness an archaic word that does not mean justice today? Surely not.

Today, we are the people of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham as the genealogy of Matthew tells us. We are the voice of hope and of righteousness in the world. But the road that Abram took was not straight. It was dangerous and perilous.

This is the same road that we are to travel. It will be lonely and scary out there. There are no guard rails on some of the mountainous roads. The rains could wash and gut the roads so that they are impassable. No, this is not easy journey, and it would be easy to detour or abandon the going. But one thing for sure, we are not alone.

We have God as our leader. We have God as our guide. We are spiritually grounded. And we do not know how to read a blank map unless the map maker is present. We do not know the lay of the land unless the creator of the land is leading. I cling to the person with the map or the directions because I am a person who can easily lose my sense of direction. It is easy to get onto unfamiliar roads with no guide to direct us. It is easy to go the wrong way or take the easy route. But somehow, the easy way is not the best way. And the wrong way, is just that.... the wrong way.

If God is the map maker and has the directions, then I think we should stick with God. If God is the guide for our life, then we should totally trust God with our life. If we can take anything out of Abram and Sarai's story, it could be this: We do not have to move our house and its possessions to another land to prove we trust God. We need to be faithful to God. We need to be true to God word. We just need to listen for God's voice who will call us into action and now is the time to be righteous, true, and faithful to the Word of God.

Now is the time to be a blessing to other people. And for me and I hope for you, I see God as the map maker. God has the directions. God knows the way. And for me, that is one less thing about which I must worry. God is completely trustworthy. God gave us his only Son to be our redeemer and eternal hope in this world and the next. And if God trusts us with his Son, then I think we should trust God with our lives.

This is the second Sunday in Lent, and I would like to share with you a poem I received from Pastor Adriana of the Central Presbyterian Reformed Church in Matanza, Cuba. She writes:

If the leaves dry, let life become coloured.

If the sky clouds, may your rays of sun announce your presence.

If the winds are strong, may the afternoon bring peace.

If the road becomes deserted, may your love be company.

If the night is very dark, may the stars shine your light.

If we lack hope, may your blessing fill us with faith.

Amen