

Blessing. Promise. Call.
Reading from the Old Testament: Genesis 11:31-12:9
Reading from the New Testament: Hebrews 11:8-10

We have a niece in New York who recently moved because it seems that for urban millennials all roads lead to Brooklyn. She will be getting a bigger room in the deal, which in that real estate market may mean that she won't have to sleep on a shelf in a closet. The news prompted for us the intriguing question of how, exactly, does someone go about moving in New York City? If I were to move from Ballantyne to, let's say, Waxhaw, and with all my macho having r-u-n-n-o-f-t, I would hire a mover to take all the heavy stuff, noting that the minimum weight limit of what constitutes heavy stuff has decreased significantly through the years.

However, I'm cheap enough to know I'd be borrowing, begging, or hot-wiring a truck and working up a big ol' sweat carting load after load of boxes, bedframes, and books to the new address. So, how does one go about moving between boroughs in NYC? Well, if you're my niece, you call Uber, repeatedly. When the driver asks how many passengers, you just smile and say, "Me and about twelve of my rather boxy, cardboard friends. And could you bring some rope? Five round trips oughtta do it."

Obviously, our niece has a lot more charm than I could muster. I know I couldn't pull that off. "You want me to what? Fugedaboudit!"

Do you know what the number one reason for not moving is? Moving. Has anyone in the whole history of moving **ever** completed a move without saying, "I'm not doing that again!"

Granted, everyone gets a little wanderlust now and then. You visit some enviable spot on vacation, the gorgeous views in West Vancouver, the vibe of Lincoln Park in Chicago, the cinematic beauty of the lakefront in Lucerne, and you start daydreaming about what it would be like or what it would take to move there. But, next time that happens, stop for a moment, just stop. Close your eyes and call to mind that visual image of you and your father-in-law straddling the threshold of that first apartment, trying to wedge that two-ton sleeper sofa through the door. You can hear the rip of the hernia in your nether regions.

But, wait a minute, keep your eyes closed; it gets better. It's a sleeper sofa and you didn't think to tie down the sleeper part. So, guess what pops open right when you are straddling that doorway? You want

to move? No thanks. I'm good. I'm like George Baily kissing that loose finial on the banister of his old, drafty house at the end of *It's a Wonderful Life*. Move? Seriously? Even military brats who need two extra pages on their resumes to list all the schools they attended growing up, will speak of moving not as an adventure, but as a trauma survived.

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." That's a tall order, and it's not just the weight of that heirloom safe that makes you sweat at the thought of it. Leave all those things that fall in the category of familiar? I know which store has a better selection of ice cream and which one carries that particular type of cracker that the other stores don't have. I know a good portion of the shortcuts that are worth trying during rush hour, and have you tasted the crab hush puppies at Pinky's? Leave all that is familiar? Just ask a retiree how fun it is to switch all those doctors when you move to a new town.

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." I've lived in North Carolina far longer than I lived in Missouri, but I still get homesick; not in January

particularly, but I still get homesick. Even the folks who complain incessantly about where they live will find it difficult to move, because truth be told, many of them will always be complaining about where they live. That's just who they are. Next place they live; they'll be complaining about that city also, telling everyone how easy it was in Charlotte to get in and out of the parking lot at Trader Joe's.

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." It would not be the first move for Abram. Sometime earlier, Abram, along with his wife, father, and nephew had migrated some 500 miles to Haran (near the border of Turkey and Syria). They had come from the ancient city of Ur, an archeological gem just upstream from modern day Basra, Iraq along the Euphrates River. Ur was a city of antiquity in which there is evidence of community life stretching back at least to 5000 or 6000 BCE.

So, while it is true that Abram and company did not have deep roots in Haran, at the age of 70, he was not necessarily at the prime age for striking yet out again into the unknown, either. Abram and Sarai had given up on starting a family long ago. There were no conversations about moving to a better school district, a golf course community, or a

better employment market. And yet, in a very particular way, the Lord calls an unlikely candidate like Abram to be a catalyst for God's purpose throughout the world.

"Go ... 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. 3 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." Sounds great God, but you're a little light on the details.

Daniel Clendenin points out that to leave, Abram would have to defy "both the inner propensities of human nature and the outer pressures of cultural conformity to cling to the familiar, the self-serving, and the broad and easy road." Abram would have "to journey from what he knew to what he did not know, from what he had to what he did not have, from the comfortable to the strange and the unpredictable." Clendenin says, "Today, most everything in our culture, education and employment encourages us to journey in the opposite direction: from the unknown to the known, from what we do not have to what we think we want and need, making every effort to remove the strange and

unpredictable in order to guarantee the safe and the secure. We demand certainty and act timidly.” (Daniel Clendenin, *Journey with Jesus*)

Big promises, God, but where’s the plan? That would be my reaction. So, what does Abram do? “Abram went.”

Every time you bow your head to pray, every time you get in your car to come to worship, go to bible study, sign up to mentor, act as an ambassador for SMPC, go to Haiti, serve homeless neighbors at the Center of Hope, participate in Faith Practice, or practice the Faith 5 with your family or a friend, very possibly talking about these things with your loved ones for the first time in your life; somewhere, bouncing around in your subconscious, is the question: Is this foolishness or is this trust? Is this naivete or is this faith?

“Abram went.” At its core, the whole Abraham narrative is about trusting something larger, grander than yourself. It is not just an outward journey but an inward journey, too. Clendenin says, “Our ultimate journey is to move from a self-regarding heart curved in on itself to an other-regarding openness to the love of God, a love for

others, and a love for all His world. That, of course, is a journey that lasts a lifetime.” (Daniel Clendenin, *Journey with Jesus*)

Abram is claimed here as God’s own. He is given the promise of what that identity may mean. And he is called to live into that promise, and in so doing, allow his blessing to become a blessing for all.

Blessing. Promise. Call. One of the great tenets of the Reformed tradition is the notion of the priesthood of all believers. Abram wasn’t unique or special any more than we are unique and special in the eyes of God, which is to say everyone is unique and special in the heart of God, and thus, everyone, yes, that means you, everyone has a calling. I don’t know what that calling is, or how it may take shape, but through what we share together here, I am hopeful we can find it out.

Think about your life. In what way is it intentionally ordered or set up to be a blessing to others? Because if we’re following the call of God, our lives need to be reflective of the expansive love and purpose of God. The Lord tells Abram and us, “through you all the families of the earth will find their blessing.” Blessed to be a blessing, following the way revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

I read an insightful comment this week of a local pastor here in Charlotte. He mentioned that a number of people were asking him if the church had any plans in regard to the hurricane. He told them, “We plan on being the church.” What? “If your neighbor has a tree on his house, YOU take out your chainsaw and help take it down. If your neighbor didn’t stock up on water, YOU share what you have. If the electricity goes out and food is scarce, YOU invite your neighbor over for a cookout on the grill. If your neighbor’s home is flooded, YOU open your doors to house them until they can safely return. If they are afraid or hurt, YOU wrap them in your arms.”

That’s being the church. You are the church. The church is a shared active, intentional journey both inward and outward following the way of Christ. We may not know where we’re going, and we may not get all the way there, but we know who is with us and leading us, and that’s enough. Abram went. Will you? Amen.

