



“Our Spiritual Family: Sacred Journey”

Homily by Rev. Greg Batson

Genesis 12:1-9

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. 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. 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.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot and all the 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. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east, and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Today we begin a series about Abraham and his family. The importance of Abraham cannot be overstated, for he is the ancestor of not one but *three* different major religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These stories are the common roots of these three faiths, and that alone is reason enough to spend some time on them. We live in a world where understanding other religious traditions is essential, and Abraham’s story is a fundamental to that understanding.

These stories also provide fascinating insights into our own lives. Abraham and Sarah and their descendants were anything but perfect; in fact, “dysfunctional” is a better description of their family life. Yet this family is guided by God’s grace to become the foundation of something great, a legacy that we carry on to this day. When we learn about their family, we learn about our own.

The story begins in a city called Haran, located near the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia. It is there that a man named Abram and his wife Sarai lived. They had lived there a long time and were well-situated. They had a large family and a home and plenty of livestock. Abram was 75 years old and most likely content to live out the remainder of his years there. But one day he hears a voice, the voice of a God he had not encountered before. “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you,” the voice said (Gen 12:1). The land that God wanted him to go to was called Canaan, 500 miles to the south, a land totally unknown to Abram and his family.

Why would Abram leave his ancestral home and extended family, pack up his belongings, and go to a strange place for a God that he had never heard of before? There is no answer in the scripture for why he followed God’s call. This God did make a promise: “I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Gen 12:2). Fine, but how do you put your trust in a promise from a God that you cannot see? It seems to be a long-shot bet, if you ask me. But people often make radical changes in their lives that they never expected.

Amazingly, Abram, Sarai and their nephew Lot packed up all their possessions and left Haran for good. They made their way to a place called Shechem where Abram had a vision of the God who had called him there. “To your offspring I will give this land,” he told Abram. So, he built a place of worship there, and journeyed to the east to Bethel, and built another altar there, until he finally made his way to the Sinai wilderness. All based on a call from God and the mere promise of a future blessing.

©Rev. Greg Batson 2026. Permission is given for brief quotation with attribution. All other rights reserved.

First United Methodist Church • 1008 Eleventh Street Santa Monica, CA
90403

www.santamonicaumc.org ■ 310-393-8258

Two thousand years later, Paul wrote a letter to the church in Rome about faith, and he used Abraham as an example. “For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law,” Paul said, “but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:13). In other words, only by obeying God’s call to leave Haran for a new, uncharted future did Abraham and his decedents become the ancestors of our own faith and receive the promise of God’s blessing. It was an “act of faith”, undertaking a risky venture into the unknown based only on trust in a divine power. It is through this belief that Abraham becomes the forerunner for Jesus, the one who links the story of Israel to the redemption of the world.

This story is not just about Abraham and Sarah who lived in the Middle East four thousand years ago. Abraham and Sarah represent each and every one of us. We are the beneficiaries of their faith and subsequent blessing by God. We also experience the same call and promise of God that they did. Each of us is on a journey through life, and the longer we travel on that journey, the more twists and turns we encounter. When we look back at where we started, I bet each of you would say, “I had no idea that this is where I would be...in this place at this time in these circumstances.” We are all on a journey, trusting that God will lead us to an unseen blessing. We may travel through strange lands along the way, but it is the journey itself that fulfills the promise God has made.

Frederick Buechner wrote a memoir of his early life entitled *Sacred Journey*. In that book, he traces his journey from childhood to his entrance as a student at Union Theological Seminary. In his introduction, Buechner tells us why he recorded these memories for us to read: “My assumption,” he writes, “is that the story of any one of us is in some measure the story of us all.”¹ He then uses this example of what he means. It is like looking through somebody else’s photo album. At one level, you look through the photos to see if you might recognize some face or place yourself. Or, if you are lucky, you may even encounter a photo of yourself amongst the pages. But even if neither of those things occurs, maybe you will put down somebody else’s photo album and pick up your own. And then, Buechner writes, “you may in the privacy of your heart...search it for the people and places you have loved and learned from yourself, and for those moments in the past – many of them half forgotten – through which you glimpsed, however dimly and fleetingly, the sacredness of your own journey.”²

The journey that each of us is on is sacred and holy. Only you walk these particular steps at this particular time. God has called you to some special purpose in life, and the journey you undertake is part of that purpose. Like Abraham and Sarah, we may not understand the reasons why God has called us to walk a particular path through life, but by faith we walk it nonetheless. It is that faith, that belief in the unknown, that trust in a power greater than ourselves, that gives us our ultimate meaning.

We also have to remember that there is another part to this story. While God asks Abraham to go to an unknown place on faith alone, God also makes a promise...a promise that not only Abraham and his family would be blessed, but that all the families of the world would be blessed through him. Blessing in the ancient Middle East meant abundant life, usually through a multitude of descendants and land to provide water and food. The promise that God makes is that the journey that Abraham will take through life will bless the entire world. How that will happen remains to be revealed in the stories that follow, but it is a promise that God makes and keeps.

Each of us are called by God to undertake a sacred journey. We begin with hopes and dreams. Along the way, there are unexpected twists and turns. There will be challenges, defeats, even despair. Yet we keep moving with the promise that God will be with us to the end. And it’s not the end of the journey that brings the blessings; it’s the risk of taking the journey itself. Your call, your journey may cover thousands of miles and many continents, or it may be a few steps right outside your door. Either way, it’s the first step of the sacred journey, following God’s call. The rest will unfold along the way. Amen.

¹ Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey* (Harper San Francisco, 1982), 6.

² *Ibid.*, 7.