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St. Margaret's Church  
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Lent IIA**

*Now the Lord said to Abram "Go." So he went.  
In the name of the one who always calls us to a new place. Amen.*

I don't necessarily like following directions. I suspect it has something to do with my genetic makeup. Not following directions comes from my father and grandfather, and great-grandfather. If you tell us to do it one way, we will do it another, just to prove a point. The trait seems to get increasingly more pronounced as a male member of the Lucas clan ages. My 84 year old grandfather continues to ride his Harley Davidson. But that's nothing compared to my great-grandfather who died at 100. We are sure he shook his cane at us from heaven when as pallbearers we mistakenly placed him in his grave backwards. It is a Lucas character flaw I suppose. Not following directions can definitely be a liability.

I wonder what Abraham's genes were like? When he and Sarah went to see friends back in Ur, did he stop to ask directions at the local oasis, or did he say, "Oh, I know the way, we take a left at that sand dune over there?" Did Sarah have any say-so, or was Abraham just as stubborn as a Lucas man, not wanting to hear any other opinions? The fact of the matter is that we don't really know what he was like, we just know what happened.

Abraham heard a voice, and he followed directions. At 75, one would have thought he might be ready to settle down. But, then again, Abraham's father, Haran, lived to be two hundred and five years old. I don't imagine that Sarah was too excited to have to pack up and move at that age, but the promise was great. They would receive God's blessing, and they would be great, and become a blessing to many more.

(As an aside, you will remember that later on in Genesis chapter 17, God changes Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham, 'father of many nations,' and Sarah 'princess', in recognition of the covenant God makes with them. These are important name changes worthy of another sermon, but I'll use the most familiar ones in order to avoid confusion.)

I wonder if Sarah thought Abraham was hearing voices. Perhaps the onset of early dementia? Did she think he was schizophrenic? Perhaps it was the heat of the desert causing him to go delirious. But he was her husband. They had already been through a great deal together, and she followed his lead because of the promise of blessing.

We have all encountered these moments in our lives. How do we respond when we feel that God has put before us a call to move forward into a greater blessing than we can even ask or imagine?

Do we immediately jump off the high dive without thinking? It seems that this is what Abraham did. The Lord spoke and told him to go, and he went. I don't know that I've ever done that without restraint and great thought and reflection. I want to do it my way first until I absolutely hit a dead end. It's hard to follow someone else's directions. It takes an incredible amount of faith, an amount that perhaps Abraham only had. Perhaps it's no wonder that the story of Abraham shapes so much of billions of peoples' lives. Abraham unites Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and gives meaning to our hopes.

I don't completely understand that kind of faith, but my hope is to have that kind of faith one day. I wish I could act as quickly as Abraham, but sometimes actions take time. Sometimes I wish the church could move as quickly as Abraham, but actions in community take even more time.

We have not acted in haste here in this faith community. We have heard God's call in many areas of our communal life together. God constantly seems to be pushing us forward or leading us to a new light and a new creation. We don't move lightly around here. We think and weigh the options, calculate the risk, pray for discernment, and pray for strength to endure whatever the consequences of progress may be. We do our best to stand for justice and the truth, come whence it may, cost what it will.

This reading from Genesis and our communal life together here are about mission, about relationships, those with each other, but more importantly about our own relationship with God, and about the relationships we have yet to build

In this passage, God speaks. "God initiates. God commands. God promises. God speaks of possibilities and new life where there seems to be only impossibility and barrenness. What God promises could not be more desirable: land, prosperity, prominence. What God commands could not be more life-altering or world-shattering. In the space between God's promises and God's command, however, the narrative is very much about Abraham. He has a choice to make. Stay with the familiar, the loved, the secure, the ending, or set out toward the unfamiliar, the unknown, the insecure, the beginning. The choice is costly and the journey will be difficult – the wilderness can be a place of struggle and doubt. But it is the way initiated by and paved with divine promise."<sup>i</sup>

I used to think of Lent as a depressing time. A time when I had to go to church and feel guilty. Suffer a little bit. But now I have come to like Lent. It is a time when I can go inward a bit, see what needs working on in there, and make some changes for the better.

This Lent is a time for us to go within and make the decision as to whether or not we are ready to move on. Move on to a new job, or a new relationship. A new building, a new city, or a new look. “The Zohar, the thirteenth-century Jewish mystical text, interprets [God’s brief charge to Abraham] as ‘Go to your self, know your self, fulfill your self.’”<sup>ii</sup>

But following a call and moving on involves some sort of loss. But what is the cost of not moving forward? What price would we pay for staying stuck in the familiar, the secure, the known?

Think about what Abraham and Sarah were leaving behind. They left their land, their community, their whole life. It was a risk, especially at their age. They could have died anywhere along the journey. They had no idea what was ahead of them. But friends, the benefit far outweighs the cost. The promise is everlasting. Had Abraham and Sarah stayed in that one place, they would never have known God so deeply. If they had stayed in that one place, the people of Israel would not have been blessed. If we stay here in one place, we risk not going deeper in our relationship with God and finding new relationships with those who have yet to hear the word of God. That’s not a risk I’m willing to take.

I don’t usually like to follow directions, but it seems to me that God has been with us and God will continue to pave a road of grace for our future. In this community we dig deep into our roots and in our relationships, and perhaps we are at a fork in the road. I believe, as Yogi Berra said, we should take it. And on the path of the road we take, we will find blessing, we will be a blessed people, and maybe that blessing can be a blessing to many more.

AMEN.

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<sup>i</sup> Yoder, Christine Roy. *New Proclamation, Year A, 2001-2002*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis. 2001. p. 164.

<sup>ii</sup> Brawarsky, Sandee. Quoted in *Talking about Genesis: A Resource Guide*. Doubleday: New York. 1996. Public Affairs Television. p. 81.