

2nd S. in Lent 3/5/23
Genesis 12:1-9 A

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.”

The Lord God said to Abram, “Go now!”

But you know what? I just don’t think I could have done it. Nope. I know, it’s not a good thing for your pastor to say he wouldn’t do what God commanded, but I invite you to take a look at what Abram was leaving behind. God could not be more specific – Leave your country, your family and your father, leave everything behind that gives you stability, any sense of security, not to mention those things that just bring joy to your life. We can use smart phones and Facetime to stay in contact with our loved ones. But not so with Abram (whose name was later changed to Abraham). This was long before the days of Facetime and smart phones, or phones of any kind for that matter. His doing what God told him to do would completely cut him off from his family. His family would go on doing their thing; Abram just wouldn’t be part of it. He wouldn’t inherit his father’s land, his children – if he were to have any – would not know their grandparents; they would never meet their cousins. God’s command to Abram was truly one-sided. It wasn’t just leave. It was to leave everything behind. What God wants Abram to do is to completely disconnect from his past – leave it all behind. I just don’t know if I could have done that.

And honestly -- I don’t think you could have done it, either. You live in your home, because you like it there. You probably spent a lot of time and energy and money making it the way you like it. Your Lazy-boy, your bed, your big-screen TV are there. The colors are the way you like them. And, aside from that one in-law or that one cousin, you don’t mind being

around your family. In fact, you kind of like it – especially you grandparents, having your grandkids around. These are the things that give you stability, a sense of security, not to mention these things just bring joy to your life. **Could you leave all that behind?**

We consider Abram a great man of faith, but even as a great man of faith, he had trouble doing what God commanded. Moses gives us a clue in our lesson, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house” (v. 1). In fact, in the original language, God’s instructions are even more emphatic, “Go now!” And what does our hero do? Well, he doesn’t exactly do what God commands. Look at what Moses tells us -- “So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and **Lot went with him.**” Oh, oh. What’s this – Lot going with him? Lot was one of his “kindred” that he was to leave behind. As it turns out, Lot would end up being a lot of trouble. If Abram had listened to God, he would have spared himself a lot of heartache.

This is not the only time, the only way, Abram showed himself weak in doing what God wanted and trusting that God would do what He promised. In the next verses of chapter 12 in Genesis, we read how God had given Abram the most beautiful woman in the land to be his wife. Sari was not only beautiful, but she was the way God has promised to deliver His promises to Abram. And yet, in Egypt, Abram lies and says, “nope, not my wife. She’s my sister.” And it’s not bad enough that he did it once; he does it again, he lies about Sarai being his wife in order to save his own skin again.

God promised that he and Sarah would a son, the first-born of a great nation. But many years pass and there is no son. So, instead of walking by faith in God’s promise, Abraham took matters into his own hands and tries to help God out a little bit. First, he tried to make Eliezer his heir and

God said “Uff da! Your own son shall be your heir” (cf. Gen 15:2-4). More years pass and still no son, so once again Abraham decides he has to help God out and fathers Ishmael with Hagar.

Over and over again, Abram showed himself to be doubtful of God’s promises. That’s why St. Paul says in our Epistle, “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God” (Ro 4:2). In fact, Abraham had nothing to boost about before God. Everything that God asked Him to do, he did imperfectly. If God had not stepped in over and over again, Abraham would have messed everything up over and over again. In spite of Abraham’s doubts and unfaithfulness, God kept His promises.

Our pride and our egos don’t like it, but the truth is: we are cut from the same bolt of cloth as Abram. God tells us to go now and make disciples, and we keep our mouths – and our checkbooks – shut. He tells us to love our neighbor and we lie and cheat, gossip and keep a record of wrongs. He tells us to pray for our enemies, but we pray for them to “get what’s coming to them.” God tells us through St. Paul, “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,” but we are pretty comfortable here in this world, conforming ourselves to its whims and ways.

Repent. The season of Lent is a time of special reflection and renewal. We are pretty comfortable in our life of sin. Things that God forbids, things that God says we don’t do – these are the things that often give you stability, a sense of security; not to mention they just bring joy to your life. And God calls upon you to leave it all behind now.

Here is the GOOD NEWS: God promised to bless you and me through Abraham and He did it in Jesus Christ. God so loved us even when we were sinners that He said to His only-begotten Son, “Go now!”

Jesus did not falter like Abram, like you, and like me. He obeyed His Father's will, was born of Virgin Mother, and took upon Himself all your disregard and refusal to do what God asks of you; all your love of earthly stuff and your love of ease; your refusal to leave the ways of this fallen world behind; your doubts of God's promises. He carried all your sin to the cross, where He bled and died for you. It is that shedding of His precious blood that wipes away every sin that you do, say, and think. That's how much your Father in heaven loves you – He does not punish temporally or eternally for your sin. He remembers His promise – and saves you in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

When we are born again in the water and Word of Holy Baptism, we become a new creation in Christ. Jesus says it this way to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn 3:5-6). That means that in our new birth, God the Holy Spirit works faith in us so that we trust, rejoice, and find comfort in Jesus alone, and we walk with Jesus.

Which is good news for us, because in the weakness of our mortal nature, we are often reluctant, filled with fear to do what God commands, or we modify it in way that we can live with, or we just ignore it altogether. We are weak, but He is strong. Jesus is with us and He does His work in us through the hearing of the Word and the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood, so that He can do His work in us. Paul says it this way in the book of Philippians, "it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (2:13).

Your Lord Christ has called you to leave behind now your life of sin to be Christ to your neighbor. That means that He make disciples, comforts

one grieving the loss of a loved one; shovels the snow from your neighbor's driveway, restores the lost sheep who has wandered from the faith, **through you**.

And always, always, Jesus is with us that we may hear His voice and follow Him in the way that leads to eternal life. And when we fail, when we sin, Jesus forgives us. That is God's promise to you and God's promises makes it happen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.