

Sermon by The Rev. Mary Jane Donohue
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Abraham. The first patriarch. Called by God to be the father of many nations. The founding father of the faith. In today's Old testament lesson we encounter his this man whose faithfulness re-set the course of Salvation History. Here in Genesis chapter 12, he is Abram, for God has not yet changed his name.

This Abram, resident of Haran, was really quite ordinary. His family was comfortable. Able to get what they needed... fairly close to when they needed it. Their religion-- Not terribly distinct from the spirituality of their surrounding culture, ---as many gods to petition and praise as there were needs and blessings. His family went to worship. People knew them in town. Abram stable, and really, quite ordinary.

Ordinary and increasingly sad. As Abram grew into his sunset years a deep insecurity was setting in. The older his wife Sarai got, the more he knew that his heart's desire would never be realized. He would not have a family, a lineage, a name. He would contribute nothing valuable to the world. Sarah was barren, and he was old. In the cultural context of the ancient world, that was an ending, a symbol for hopelessness. When there are no children, there is no future.

Abram was an ordinary man, with an ever increasing fear of his own cosmic insignificance.

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.

God called to Abram with a promise. You want to have a name? You will have a great name. You have blessings now, they will be as dust when compared with the riches I have in store for you. All of your longings will be satisfied, all of your dreams --transcended. Your heart will be healed, your spirit will sing, your mind will be astonished. Will ooze joy. You want a baby. You will have a baby. You will be a father of many nations. From your seed will com the people of God. From your people, the Messiah. And that's a promise.

All you must do is Leave. And Go.

For in order to walk in this promise, you will have to leave your comfortable, familiar present. Yes, it is in part because of its values, the worship of self and the sidelining of God. The belief that humans can control and conquer anything, if they only focus, and work hard. Yes, you must leave because this is toxic air which you cannot possibly breath and follow me.

But the main reason you can't simultaneously stay here and live into my promise, is that if you stay, you will be tempted to continue to live in your own strength in stead of mine. Once you do that, the fruit of your life will be limited by that which *you* can create. A steady and variably satisfying existence. But there will be no miracles, no outrageous transcendent surprises, no amazing grace, and therefore no opportunity for true worship. There will and can only be what you do and make. which might be very nice. You might find your self on a regular basis, at the end of the day, in a comfy chair, with your feet up. You are welcome to that life.

But what of your deep longing. I hear and know a cry from you, that is deeper than your need for security and sensibility. I hear a in you a hunger that I am telling you can only be satisfied by absolute dependence on me. I am inviting you to a new life, that you can't have at the same time as your old one. But it will be a better one. I promise. I am offering you a live lived in intimate community with the triune divine. With me, Abraham. I am asking you to trust me with your livelihood and your loved ones, your spirit and your heart. I am here calling to you.

God reached out to Abram, in his ordinary state. And Abram said yes.

And at that moment he, and his life, ceased to be ordinary.

Abram yielded control of his life and destiny to a promise. He went as the Lord had told him. He gathered up his wife, his nephew and his stuff, "And they set forth." Lands explored and altars built. As Abram and his people wandered, they had no idea where they were going but they knew with varying degrees of confidence, that they were in good hands. In the hands of goodness itself, completely dependent on the love and mercy of God.

Battles were won and lost. There were moments of insight and growth, and entire seasons of bad judgement. And Abram continued to believe. No children in sight. But there was Don Quixote, continuing to listen and follow, still saying yes. Abram believed the promise, and it was counted to him as righteousness. There were family spats and squabbles, fair and foul play. And then, yes, a baby...born to a very old woman, who was married to a very old, very happy man. And a nation was born, to a barren womb, with three small words. Leave. Go. Yes.

Yesterday, five of you registered your first official “yes.” Iain, it was your 2nd.

God has called you forward to a life of Christian love and service, into an intimate, dependent love relationship. And you have said *yes*.

It may not seem to be as momentous a choice as Abram’s, to leave his home in Haran to set off for unknown places. But really, in some ways, you live in Haran. Or should I say “Old Haran.” The promise of fulfillment through hard work and positive thinking, through the efforts of self. You can do it, be it, if you only try. You define your own reality. Trust only yourself. Do whatever it takes...to win. .” Go after what you want, take what you need. Yes, in many ways you live in Haran. A world driven by impotent idols, fueled by false promises.

Yesterday, you six said *no* to these foreign God’s and pledged to place your trust in the promises the God of Abraham. In saying *yes*, you allowed yourselves to be named as children of Abraham. Children of the promise. Your *yes*, is now a part of his *yes*.

Today, we’re packing up. Gathering ourselves for this mysterious journey into new life. We’ve made commitments---to look for Christ in others, to resist evil, to work for justice and peace. We have pledged to praise and to give thanks. We’ve cashed all of our chips in, believing that truly abundant life flows from true intimacy with God. We’re all in.

And what a ride we are in for. Kevin, you will need to lead us. God has given you the gift of leadership and we will follow you. This is the first test of our faith. You will rally us and we will go with you.

In the off chance that you might lose track of where it is we are supposed to be going, Allison, you will need to teach us. Teach us about God. About the history of the people of God. The kinds of things God does, and is. So when we are faced with options, we will move forward with informed, confident faith.

As we travel, following God's promise into this new land, we will get tired. First one, then another, may stop on the path. And then we will *need you* Amanda, to get us fired up. To encourage us, that we can do it! To rally us to press on.

And we will. We will say yes, again. We will delight in the outrageous blessings of this life with God. When we taste and see the goodness of the Lord. We will rejoice as God's blessings far exceed all that we could have asked or imagined.

We will fight. We will fight over where we are going. And why. We will hurt one another, at times quite deeply. At those times we will need you Hannah to teach us Mercy and to encourage us to *stop being mad*, and to move on. And we will.

From time to time we will come upon other bands of travelers. When we come upon a camp that has run out of food, Emma will make us stop, open out packs, and each take out two cans of tuna, and put them in a box. As she hoists her box and begins to head towards the hungry, Kevin will stop her "Hold up. Stay right there," as he runs to the neighboring camp and says "uh. Hi. We have some food and...well, do you want to have lunch with us?" Kevin's Hospitality meets Emma's generosity *and* outreach...a triple play!

As we grow in love with God, our hearts will be re-formed. We will feel the pain of human violence in new depths. We will weep. One or two of us may even begin to slip away, overwhelmed, overcome. And Iain will come, to each one, and sit. Quietly. And nod. And burdens will lighten. Without a word. Without even a yes.

There will be times when we raise our voices in sweet psalms. And more often, as true children of Abraham, we will raise our voices to grumble. When our last yes is too long ago to recall, we may *all* choose to turn back, give up, convinced that life in Haran was limited, but preferable, certainly

easier to control and predict. And in those moments, when fear threatens to drive us back into captivity. Then we will really need you Allison, we will need your faith. **You** will remind us, why we left. You will remind us of the blessings and the psalms and fruits of the life we have begun to live in God's land and in God's arms. You will tell us whose we are.

And then Kevin, you'll pull us to our feet and state the plan. Alright guys, uhm. We don't really know why we're here right now, but uh, Allison does. And she has faith and right now we don't so...Allison can we borrow your faith till we remember?

The legacy of Abraham continues today in you brave travelers. It continues in every one of us who hears and responds to the call of God...And lest we consider this a tale for childish idealists, let us not forget that Abram was 75 when he made his "confirmation."

You are walking in the promise of Abraham, right now. Remember part of that promise was that Abraham's faith journey would be a blessing to others. You are children of Abraham. And we are blessed by your *yes* in our midst. As strange and scary as this new and mysterious life might seem, know that not one of you is alone. Many have gone before, many will come after, and many travel right now, right beside.

So, you ready? Let's go.