

“Father Abraham”

Genesis 12: 1-9

This week, we meet for the first time-Abram, soon to be known to the world as “Father Abraham”. This title of “Father Abraham” is bestowed on Abram for many reasons. One reason is because that three of the major world religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all trace their faith heritage back to him, back to Father Abraham. Abram also receives this title because as we are told in our text, through Abraham, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Through this blessing, Father Abraham has many sons and daughters.

Now we would think that if Father Abraham leaves such an important legacy for the world then he must have been some great guy! He must have been a real pillar of faith for God to have chosen him. After all, all the families of the earth shall be blessed through him.

But strangely, we aren't really told anything about him. Unlike Noah in our previous story, unlike Noah who we are told walked with the Lord, who was righteous, we really don't know anything about Abraham. We really don't know why God chose him through which to bless all the families of the earth.

Our first introduction to Abraham comes in this very unassuming, very, let's just say boring story. This story is certainly no action packed. There is no Flood.

There is no talking snake. All we have is some guy being commanded by God to go to a land where God has promised to make through him a great nation. It seems like such a simple unassuming story. But there is more going on in this story than meets the eye.

This story of the Call of Abram is a turning point in the history of our faith. Everything that shapes our identity as the people of God rides on Abram's response. This is the moment that will set into motion the continued relationship between God and God's people. In this moment in time, God changes God's focus from the wider cosmos and pinpoints that focus to just one man, this one man we claim as our Father Abraham in whom all families of the earth shall be blessed.

Everything rides on this moment and this man, this man who we virtually know nothing about. At this point in the story, I find myself asking, "This is God's plan for bringing the world back into wholeness? Calling just some guy for the job? How are we supposed to know that he is qualified? At least with Noah, we were told that he walked with the Lord and that he was righteous. We know nothing about Abraham, except that he is Terah's son. What in the world is God thinking? Surely God has hedged God's bets a bit and picked some great guy, Right?

Uh... no. Here is what we know about this guy, this "Father Abraham". We are told that "the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country, and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you." Okay, once again, let's hope God knows what God is doing. Surely God picked some young man who was up for the task. Some young man maybe just starting out in life, that doesn't have too many responsibilities to weigh him down. Surely God picked some young person who is ready for adventure to start this journey. So much depends on this moment, on this one man that surely God would have picked someone who was qualified and young, right?

Uh...no. As we continue to read this story, we come to find out that Abram is 75 when he sets out on this unknown journey on which God called him. 75 years old! Once again, what in the world is God thinking? God, do you just set yourself up for failure?

God, don't you see that Abraham at this point in his life is settled? He has already planted deep roots in this location. God, really, really, at this point, when Abraham is comfortable, when Abraham has prosperity and social status, when Abraham is feeling pretty safe and secure, you are going to tell him, "Go"? God, really, really? You think Abraham is going to leave everything that is familiar and travel to some unknown land? Once again, God, I have got to ask, Do you just set yourself up for failure? Too much is riding on this moment. And you pick some

guy, who Lord only knows if he is qualified for the journey, and on top of that is 75 years old? Once again, God, I have to ask: What in the world were you thinking?

I guess it goes to show that God knows better than we do. What constantly amazes me about this story is that Abraham went when God called. No questions asked. In response to God's call, he loaded up his caravan, disrupted not only his life but the life of his wife, the lives of his household and all their families. Abraham loaded up the caravan and went in response to God's call. There was no delay.

He didn't turn to God and say, "Well, thanks for the offer. It sounds great but now just isn't a good time for me. Abraham didn't turn to God and say, "If I go, what's in it for me? He also didn't turn to God and say, "Well, before I commit, before I disrupt everyone's lives, and begin packing, tell me exactly what you expect from me. Before I agree to go to this unknown land, God, I need to know it is going to be worth my while. Tell me just exactly how long this journey is going to take. I have got things to do. Nor did he say, before I agree to this, tell me just what exactly is waiting for me when I get there."

Abraham didn't turn to God and give excuses. God commanded and Abraham obeyed. He packed up his family and started out on this unknown, risky

journey to which God call him. Abraham reorders his life in immediate response to the Word of God.

And we were worried he wasn't qualified? Thankfully, God knew what God was about when God called Abraham. Thankfully God didn't listen to us. Thankfully God saw the bigger picture and ignored our worries and fears.

Thankfully God is God and we are not.

In response to God's life changing, life giving Word, Abram takes the risk, reorders his life and goes where God is calling him to go. How many of us can say the same thing?

I take it from the uncomfortable silence that I hit a nerve here.

I don't think that many people, myself included, would do what Abraham did in our story today. When called by God, he was given no guarantees. He wasn't told it would be an easy journey without any complications or without any risks. All he was told was that God would make a great nation out of him. All he was told was that God would bless him and make his name great. All he was told was that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him.

And that was more than enough to get Abraham to leave it all behind, to leave all that was familiar, to leave all that was comfortable and safe and follow God. No specifics. No guarantees but still there was the promise. And it was more

than enough to get Abraham to go on this journey to some unknown land, to get Abraham to follow God.

What this wonderfully unassuming story reminds us is that faith is risky. It is a risky decision to embrace the journey. Faith in God is the life changing, life giving risky decision to go where God calls us even when that call leads us to some uncomfortable and unknown places.

Faith in God is not about guarantees. It is about the promise of new life given to all of us when God claimed us and named as God's own. And that promise is more than enough to get us to follow our God wherever God may lead us. That promise is more than enough to become the people God created us to be, the people God calls us to be. That promise of wholeness, that promise of healing, that promise of God's peace filling this world is more than enough incentive for us to leave our safety and security and go out in the world, sharing God's grace and love with all that we meet.

Because here's the thing: this promise of new life, this promise of hope, this promise of wholeness is how all the families of the earth shall be blessed. This promise of the coming of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom where every tear will be wiped away, where hate and hurt no longer tear this world apart, this promise of the coming of the Kingdom of God, where a young white man doesn't go into a

black church and kill nine people, this promise of God's reconciling love is how all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And it all starts, not with excuses but by the people of God responding to the life giving life affirming word of God.

You see, Abraham is not permitted to live in a vacuum. As he journeys, he is interacting with others. He discovers that he is in relationship with others. As he journeys Abraham realizes that he is connected with other people, people who don't think like him, people that don't act like him, people who are different in skin color, and political views, Abraham discovers that he is connected with others who regardless of the differences are still claimed and named as children of God.

On this journey, Abraham becomes a blessing to others. Abraham becomes a blessing for others. All because he was open to the ongoing, life giving, life transforming, life-affirming relationship God offered him. On this journey, Abraham's very way of life, his very way of being is the blessing. His words, his actions, his interactions with others, his relationships become a model for others on how to receive a blessing from God. Abraham becomes a way to share the promise of God's reconciling love and uniting grace with others.

Now, let me stop right there. When I say blessing from God, I am not talking about riches. I am not talking about believing in God just so we can prosper in worldly things. When I say blessings from God, I am talking about things that have

their being in the Kingdom of God, things like wholeness, things like healing, things like peace and grace, things like hope and love. These are the blessings that fill Abraham's life and our lives as well when we respond to God's call, when we step out in faith and allow God to lead us.

Abraham could have just have easily ignored God's command and stayed exactly where he was. He had a good life. He was settled. He was comfortable. He had all the things he thought he needed. Abraham could have easily ignored God's call. He could have ignored the brokenness, the hurt and the hate that filled and continues to fill God's world. But suddenly God calls. God's life giving, life transforming, life affirming word changes all. No longer can Abraham sit in comfort and security and pretend he isn't connected to the wider world. No longer can Abraham stay in his bubble and pretend he is not affected by the hate and hurt that fills God's creation. No longer can Abraham say the darkness that threatens to overtake the light doesn't affect him. God's call, God's word changes all that.

Abraham takes the risk of following God. His eyes are opened to a world beyond his imagining. Abraham could have easily stayed right where he was in safety but that life would have been barren and empty. That life wasn't what the world needed right then. That life where Abraham stayed isolated and disconnected, only concerned about his wants and needs, wasn't what God needed right then. God needed someone to go. God needed someone to leave the

comfortable life behind and take a risk. God needed Abraham to respond so that all the families of the earth would be blessed, so that all the families on the earth would know and experience God's reconciling and healing love. God needed Abraham to act.

Abraham takes the risk. In doing so, he is given hope and the world knows hope. Abraham takes the risk. In doing so, he is given grace and the world knows grace. Through this journey to the unknown, through this journey filled with risks, through this journey filled with no guarantees, Abraham is given the opportunity to be blessing to others and for others. All because he acted in response to God's life changing, life transforming life affirming Word of God.

I wonder how many of us can say the same thing?