

Sermon

“Go!”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, June 11, 2023

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Psalm 131 (Robert Alter Translation)

*Lord, my heart is not haughty,
nor have my eyes looked too high,
nor have I striven for great things,
nor for things too wondrous for me.*

*But I have calmed and contented myself
like a weaned babe on its mother —
like a weaned babe I am with myself.*

*Wait, O Israel, for the Lord,
now and forevermore.*

Gen. 12:1 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. 2 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. 3 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.”

4 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. 5 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, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. 7 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. 8 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. 9 And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

I. I marvel at the God we find in the Bible.

A. On the one hand — Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

1. Patient and willing to endure much while waiting for us to follow.

B. On the other hand — The kind of God who makes it clear that to follow God means that we cannot have it both ways.

1. We have to *choose*.

Luke 16:13 No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Matthew 8:21 Another of his disciples said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 22 But Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

C. Following God involves the choice to stop chasing after some other things.

Jeremiah 2:4 “What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and chased after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?”

II. In the book of Genesis scholars have long noticed a shift that begins at chapter 12.

A. Chapters 1-11 have been called “pre-history.”

1. creation

2. Cain & Able

3. Odd story of the Nephilim

4. Noah and the arc

5. **The tower of Babbler**
- B. **But beginning with chapter 12 we start the stories of the great families of faith:**
 1. **Abraham, Sarah and Hagar**
 2. **Isaac and Rebecca**
 3. **Jacob Rachel and Leah**
 4. **Joseph and Aseneth**
- C. **This major shift in the Bible to telling the stories of God and the families of faith begins with the imperative, “Go!”**

Gen. 12:1 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. 2 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.

1. **The calling of God begins with the invitation to leave what is familiar and wander for the love of God.**
 - † **father’s house, kindred, country...**
2. **God goes with us to bless us - so that we may become a blessing to the world.**
- D. **This invitation and purpose is at the heart of the discipline of pilgrimage.**
 1. **We depart what is familiar in search of the God who says, “Go!”**
 2. **We do this, not only for ourselves, but in the hope that as we journey with God we will be shaped into the sort of people who bless everyone we encounter along the way.**

I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

III. We might wonder *why* God would ask us to leave what is familiar and go into the wild world . . .

A. Perhaps because that is what God has done:

“...For us and for our salvation, God came down...” (Nicene Creed)

1. As it turns out God’s love leads God to “come down” in the person of Jesus to dwell among us full of grace & truth — in order to bless us.

2. The impulse to “Go!” is a response to the demands of love.

† **God’s love for us brings God down...**

† **Our love for God invites us to go in search for God among the strangers we will encounter on pilgrimage.**

B. Perhaps, too, it is because God knows how exceptionally difficult it is to become someone new while staying at home.

1. Abram becomes Abraham and Sarai becomes Sarah precisely because they leave home.

2. Jacob becomes Israel after leaving for years

3. Cephas becomes Peter after leaving home to follow Jesus

4. Saul becomes Paul after his encounter on the way to distant Damascus.

C. Modern anthropology gives us names for the process of growing into someone new and the role of leaving home in that process.

1. The seminal work of Victor and Elizabeth Turner in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*

† **Briefly describe: We become enter Liminality by crossing over the threshold**

and risking departure from all that normally defines us.

Typically requires: Time, distance, quiet. With enough time, distance, and quiet we *can* imagine being someone new.

IV. Today we commission our pilgrims for the walking of the Camino de Santiago.

A. We are acknowledging that we are answering the call to:

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 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. 3 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.”

B. We, too, who remain in Cary are also invited to journey with them:

† **In daily prayers**

† **Devotions**

† **Learning opportunities like next Sunday AM**

C. Our hope is that in making this pilgrimage they will

† **Encounter God in one another and in the strangers they meet along the way.**

† **That the inevitable struggles which happened those who make a pilgrimage will only strengthen their faith and lead to deeper insights about the love of God.**

† **That their wandering for the love of God will lead them in right paths.**

† **That their walk with God will lead to a renewal of faith.**

V. We Presbyterians follow in a long line of Christians who believe that it is God’s calling which defines the good life - the life worth living.

A. That’s what we mean when we talk about vocation — our vocation is what happens when we tune our ears and our hearts to hear the invitation of God to “Go!”

B. In the words of Carlo Carretto, calling is like this:

God’s call is mysterious; it comes in the darkness of faith. It is so fine, so subtle, that it is only with the deepest silence within us that we can hear it.

And yet nothing is so decisive and overpowering for a man on this earth, nothing surer or stronger.

This call is uninterrupted: God is always calling us! But there are distinctive moments in this call of his, moments which leave a permanent mark on us --moments which we never forget.” preface xv
Letters from the Desert

C. May all who engage in CPC Treks the Camino

1. Those at home here in NC

2. Those who walk many miles in Spain

May we all hear and respond to God’s decisive, sure, strong, and uninterrupted calling — and may we encounter the God who loves us enough to call us out in moments of grace which we never forget.