

Be Moved to follow God's Call

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Text: Genesis 12-13

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Our Neighbors who are Old Order Mennonite - once took our family along with theirs to visit their family farm. We traveled about a country block in a covered buggy from where we live in the village of Floradale - to their family farm in Yatton. The whole trip took about 20 minutes.

We bumped over gravel roads, snuggled in tight – with – I remember - the prominent posterior view of the horse in front, most visible through the largest window - Until we arrived at the long, tree-shaded laneway that led us to the farm. It is a beautiful farm and it was obvious that they were pleased to show it to us – pleased, but not proud.

We saw the wide, stone house sitting ever so slightly on a hill with a lovely view and a sprawling veggie garden beside. Our neighbor Earla and her grown daughters went first to the garden to help, while Enos, Earla's husband, and their son Carl showed us around the barns. We marveled at the dairy operation - and peppered them with questions. Enos' chubby, happy little granddaughter joined us in the barn in her stroller, with her Mom.

The part of this visit that stays with me - happened afterwards - when we piled back into the buggy and waved good bye to Carl and his young family. Enos said softly to my husband Peter, "You can only leave a farm like this - for the love of a Son". Carl, who is Enos and Earla's only son, needed a place to live once married – and this meant that Enos and Earla had to make a difficult decision. Much earlier than expected, to give over the reins to the family farm to Carl, they were just in their early 50's.

As with most of our decisions in this life – especially the big ones – there are many layers involved. I have always admired Enos and Earla's decision to come to the metropolis of Floradale and to take up running the general store – because it was done not only out of the love of a Son but to provide work and housing for their five remaining, unmarried daughters – this creative thinking was also an act of love.

The act of moving, and of settling land amongst family – Is one part of the Abram, Sarai and Lot's story. As you heard in the children's time this morning and can see in their artwork –

God calls Abram and his family out of the familiar comfort of their home and home land –the land that Abram had lived on and farmed with his Father, Terah. The same land on which Abram's brother Haran had died – leaving a nephew, Lot, to Abram and Sarai's care. This was a high stakes decision for Abram and Sarai to leave their Motherland, to uproot their people and animals for a long journey into the unknown with God.

And we could leave the focus of this sermon here – resting on the fact that: Moving one's geographical location can be very hard. A geographical move is prompted for a variety of reasons. It is

an experience that most of us can relate to and it often requires a lot from the individuals involved in the move.

I am also struck by the fact – that there are too many people in this world who live with a limited ability to move freely. Let us for a moment think of modern day Hebron, where Abram and Sarai finally end up. The Land promised to Abram by God, - upon which he will begin a great nation and become a great person of Faith.

In modern day Hebron - many Palestinian children, youth, and their families are not free to move...there are guns and check points, and a very real fear for children to simply walk to and from school.

On a learning tour to Israel Palestine with Mennonite Central Committee I carry a snapshot in my mind of modern day Hebron, marked by a holy site (Abram's burial place) where – like many places in the Holy land – are claimed by more than one people group. It is a building – a holy building - meant for worship – one building divided by a wall -one half a mosque and the other a synagogue; a check point must be crossed to enter this place...to pray.

Other places in the world may come to mind for you – where the powerful - limit the movement, the choices, the freedoms - of the less powerful. This is a pattern, unfortunately, that has been repeated throughout history. And Canada's history and modern times are too marked by the sorted, complicated power struggle over land.

Land ownership - is a theme arising from this story. And we have a positive picture here of how Abram is gracious - and finds a peaceful way to divide the land with his nephew, Lot. In the close of this story – the dividing of the land is a task where “fair” does not mean equal. But, the two men part on good terms.

The most compelling part of this saga, for me, however, rests in the “being Called by God”. Abram is called out of comfort zone - his home, his familiar landscape and community to Journey into the unknown with God. Abram is called, as we all are, into relationship with God - in a unique and intimate way. He must learn to trust this call as he journeys with God.

Yet, somewhere along the way his fear takes over, for Abram. Near the end of Genesis chapter 12, Abram appears painfully human. And I love that the Bible blesses us with lots of permission to be human in the lives of the great people of faith. The journey with God had begun so well – their path together - marked with altars – with signs of commitment from Abram along the way.

And then Abram's immediate needs and surroundings take over, there is famine in the land – Abram's fear makes his world seem small. He seems to quickly take the reins into his own hands and steer the long caravan of his people and flocks toward Egypt.

Off course from his God and his own compass found in God - he flounders, he lies about Sarai being his wife, for fear of being killed - and almost loses her to Pharaoh's harem. (A story that scholars

tell us, foreshadows the Israelite people leaving captivity in Egypt many years later – after the plagues are once again sent to Pharaoh by God.)

In my experience, a call from God is not always clear. Being “called”, does not indicate a straight path – it is indeed a journey. A sense of call is can feel disruptive and can be difficult to integrate into our lives – it nudges and pushes us beyond our comfort zones. Our God loves diversity and so there are many ways that we as God’s people work out our entrusted passions and purposes on this earth.

Being called is first - about being called into relationship, like Abram. And it is about experiencing seasons of doubt and times when we lose our way – when we mistakenly think that we must rely on our own strengths to get through. We can only see the mud – outside the fears that hold us captive – and forget about the stars...the light that guides us.

As a community – How are we being called together? I have been moved to tears more than once amongst you. In hearing stories – amazingly, rich stories - about the work that many of you do – this is a vibrant, deeply intentional and passionate group of people – that is most evident.

But how do we - as a church - bring our individual calls together? Why do we come here? What is significant and special about this place where we meet together and where our lives intersect?

What is Waterloo North Mennonite Church? What is it - for our children? For Our Youth? For our Young adults, our Middle Aged people and for our esteemed Elders? What can it be? How are we inspired to Dream again and again about this place?

Do we come here to receive comfort and then to go out individually to be the salt and light to the world around us in many creative ways? **Is this enough? As we hear in the story of Abram, God’s call is not a call to comfort. Let us not become too comfortable here – we must ever strive - for each other and for this community to be far more than comfortable!**

We are strong enough to be challenged and to continue to stretch ourselves in this place. God calls - to the deepest, most vulnerable parts of us. God calls for our best selves to be present – to be open – to be changed and challenged - and moved.

What vision can bind us together and give us more strength as we begin the path towards calling for New Lay and Pastoral leadership? How can we continue to push at the natural tendencies - for any group to grow stagnant, or complacent, or individualistic, or disconnected from each other? We know that there are many people doing inspiring things both inside and outside of this place. May we ever be moved (like Abram) to dream and to vision and to continue to search out God’s call for us - as we look to the future. Amen.