

Date: February 21, 2016  
Scriptures: Psalm 27; Genesis 15:1-11, 17-18  
Title: Leaving Home

Have you ever pulled up stakes  
and moved to a new and totally different place?  
Perhaps you did it as a child  
as your father was transferred from place to place.  
Or when you went off to college.  
Or after graduation  
when you moved to take your first “real” job.  
Or when in response to God’s call on your life,  
you came to seminary.  
We are today a wandering people.  
We always have been

Even if a move is “good,”  
it can be laced with anxiety and uncertainty.  
Laced with the fear of not knowing what will happen  
or how we will meet the challenges we encounter.  
If we have the option,  
we may decide the dislocation and uncertainty  
are just too much of a risk  
and stay where we are.  
And, there can be extenuating circumstances  
which keep us in place.  
Save that, if we allow fear to set the course of our lives,  
we may miss out on unseen blessings  
God desires to bestow.

Abraham, the father of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph,  
was born in Mesopotamia,  
which today is Iraq, Syria, and Kuwait.  
He was a direct descendant of Noah  
through Noah’s son, Shem.  
His father was Terah,  
who had two other sons, Nahor and Haran.  
After the death of Haran,  
Terah with his son Abram and Abram’s wife, Sarai,  
and Haran’s son, Lot,  
moved to an area just north of the Euphrates

where his son Nahor lived.  
There, they lived until Terah died.

The death of someone close to us  
wreaks havoc with our world.  
The closer the relationship,  
the more acutely we feel the loss.  
The deeper and more prolonged is the grief.  
Grief impacts every facet of our lives.  
It is a full body response.  
We feel it in our hearts and in our spirits,  
in our minds and in our bodies.  
While we may not realize it,  
a time of grief is also a liminal time,  
a time of transitions,  
a time when we stand on the threshold  
between an old self  
and a new not yet born self.  
In this liminal time, earth and heaven touch  
and we are most open to God's whisperings to us.

So it may have been with Abram.  
The grief of losing someone,  
who had been a significant part of his life for 75 years,  
may have propelled him  
into an intense period of grief and introspection.

With introspection comes silence.  
It comes "on little cat feet" (Carl Sandberg)  
as we draw away from others.  
In the space created by silence,  
we are able to hear more clearly our own true voice  
and also God's voice speaking to us.

It was then,  
after his father's death,  
that Abram heard God say to him,  
"Go forth from your country,  
and from your relatives,  
and from your father's house,  
to the land I will show you  
and I will make you a great nation. . . ." (Genesis 12:

Now, to our ears,

God's offer may sound like one not to be refused.

Almost 4000 years later,

we know how the story ends.

For Abram, what God proposed was risky business.

Then, both a person's identity and security

came from the family.

Striking off on your own was dangerous.

Going to an unknown place,

a place you'd never been before,

without the benefit of Google maps and cell phones  
increased the danger significantly.

In spite of the danger,

Abram heeded God's call.

He did make one minor adjustment to God's plan.

He took his wife, Sari,

his nephew Lot,

and all the possessions and people  
he had accumulated with him.

Abram and his party left where they were

just north of the Euphrates River

and headed to the land of Canaan.

Once they forded the Euphrates

they continued across Canaan

moving from the north to the south.

Along the way,

Abram built altars and claimed the land.

When they reached the southern most border,

they encountered a severe famine in the region.

Abraham decided

to cross over into the Egypt

to wait out the famine.

Afterward, they returned to Canaan

and settled in Hebron near the oak of Mamre,

the place where Abram erected

the first altar in the land.

During those many years,

God repeatedly promised Abram

that he would one day be given

all the land he could see  
and descendants as plentiful  
as the dust of the earth.

Each time he heard this,

Abram said not a word to God in reply.

That is not until he rescued Lot  
from his captors' snare.

A daring rescue, it pitted Abram and his men  
against four kings and their vast armies.

Those four kings had set out to quell a rebellion  
lead by the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and others.

The four kings overran Sodom,  
plundered the land,

and carried off its people including Lot.

Abram and his men routed the armies

and chased them north almost to Damascus.

His victory did more than free his nephew Lot.

It also prompted the King of Sodom to offer him  
the spoils of the war.

But, to show that his blessings came from God alone,

Abram declined

and suggested his men receive them instead.

Through it all,

Abram sought to be faithful to his God.

Yet, something was working in him.

He was thinking,

thinking about all the promises God had made to him  
through the years.

Granted he had land,

but certainly not as far as the eye could see.

And heirs, that too was an empty promise,  
for he had none.

These thoughts worked on him

from early in the morning until late in the night.

Still, he kept silent;

not a word did he say to God.

So God came to him in a vision and said,

"Do not be afraid.

I am your shield.

Your reward will be great."

It was then  
 that the dam, welled up inside of him, broke,  
 and the torrent of words came spilling out.

Then, he poured out his heart to God exclaiming,  
 "O Lord, God,  
 what good are promises  
 and what good is land  
 if I have no heir?"

To whom  
 will I leave my possessions?  
 Who from all the people of the earth  
 will remember me?"

Hearing him,  
 God responded kindly and patiently  
 and once again promised him  
 a son born of his flesh and blood.

Then, to emphasize the point,  
 God took him outside  
 and directed his attention to the stars  
 telling him as the stars fill the heavens  
 so will your descendants fill the earth.

That is not all God did.  
 This time God sealed the promise with a covenant,  
 which God enacted by passing  
 between the halves of slaughtered animals.

A voice calls out to Abram.  
 It is God calling him  
 to leave home,  
 to leave safety and security behind,  
 to let go of the known,  
 the tried and true,  
 the comfortable,  
 to turn away from the world's certainties  
 and his own narrow perceptions.

It is a voice calling Abram  
 to open his hand and relinquish all that he is  
 so he can become all that he is not.

Ultimately, God is calling Abram  
 to find a new home,

a home firmly rooted in trust in God alone,  
 a home as expansive as the heavens  
 filled with as many possibilities as stars in the sky,  
 a home where gifts are given,  
 hopes fulfilled,  
 fears relieved.

It is a voice that says,  
 "You may be dust, but you are stardust."

Lent can be a liminal time,  
 a time when we stand on the threshold  
 between an old self and a new not yet born self.

It can be **that if we, like Abram, are**  
**willing** to hear and heed God's voice;  
**willing** to pull up stakes and leave home;  
**willing** to turn away from believing  
 that we are the source of our safety and security;  
**willing** to turn away from  
 our narrow perceptions and critical judgments  
 that led us to see the world as small and limited.

Lent can give rise to a new self  
 if we are willing to look at the heavens  
 and see God's creative possibilities  
 and intricate attention to detail.

As we live into these truths,  
 we begin to understand  
 that our one true home  
 is not a place or a thing  
 but a relationship,  
 a relationship with God.

In that relationship  
 we come home to God and to ourselves  
 and our **dust** becomes **stardust**,  
 the stuff of God's good creation,  
 and we shine as brightly

as the stars in the night sky. Amen