

*Second Sunday in Lent*

February 25, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Mark. (Mark 8: 31-38)

[Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

The Gospel of our Lord,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

First, it's snowing this week. Did you notice? At times like this, I have a lot of sympathy for weathercasters. You know, the weathercasters who always get it wrong and we always give them a lot of grief for it. Even with all the maps and the data and their computers, something changes in the weather pattern. Because what we are asking of these folks is to predict the future, down to the minute. Even as far as a week out, we want to know how much snow we'll get and when it's going to arrive and when it will stop.

Actually, I don't think we really want to know how much snow will arrive. What we really want to know is how much pain you're going to be in. Will it take me ten minutes or two hours to get to the meeting downtown? Will I have to shovel my driveway twice or three times before the storm is over? Will there be a snow emergency? Will schools close? How painful will this snowfall be?

We want weathercasters to help us plan ahead, because we like to plan ahead and snow disrupts it. I started getting calls and emails as early as Friday saying, "I'm not sure I'm going to make it to the service on Sunday, so you're going to have to find a sub for me." We moved the adult choir to the late service instead of the early service. We want to keep it safe. We want to know what's going on. We want to be in control.

Knowing all of that, I wonder how we would handle a request from God like the one that Abram received in Genesis 12:

*"Go from your county 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."*

There is not a lot of information there. There is no address to plug into the GPS. No timelines for the schedule of when they will be at the land. No sense of how hard or painful it's going to be. No sense of how much effort will be involved. Just go. "Go into the land that someday I'm going to show you."

Could we do that? Could we go like that? Actually, I'm not going to ask that question because I'm not sure that any of us would be willing to just go without guarantees or certainties. My question instead is, "Why did Abram go?" Why did Abram give up everything and just go? Was he young and idealistic? No. We know that he was seventy-five years old at the time. Was his life that bad that he just had to leave? The text doesn't say that. He had a family and flocks and servants. He couldn't have been that desperate.

So what did Abram hear from God? What does he see that made him want to give up everything – his family, his citizenship, his home, his past, his safety net, everything – and go with only a promise of land, and children, and a future?

We are people of certainty. We want to know the weather reports, the stock reports, the quarterly earnings, what the teacher is going to put on the test, what to do to get into college, what to do to get the job, what to do to find the right relationship. We want to know how to get it done with the least amount of pain and the most amount of success.

Abram, on the other hand, let go of certainty in service of a vision. He saw something in this promise, something worth all of the disruption and the risk. This vision, this future, this hope, was worth risking everything.

What vision would be worth that much for any of us? What do we want most in this life: a nice house, a happy family, a little money in the bank for retirement? I think our vision is larger than that.

What do we want for this church, for this city, for this world? What is the future that God is calling us into? If I were to ask you to describe or draw a picture in great detail of what the future that God is leading us to, what would that look like? Can you imagine such a future?

I'm going to ask you to take a minute, in conversation with God, about what the very best future is for yourself and for this world. Think about that for a minute.

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This vision of God's future that Abram saw captured him, and he and Sarai picked up everything and wandered off in search of it. They wandered a long time. By the time today's reading comes up, they had been wandering for twenty-four years. Abram is ninety-nine now, and Sarai is ninety. Ishmael is thirteen. The vision is old and yellowed. Abram and Sarai are at the point of packing away the vision and calling life good.

But God won't stop. "*You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations,*" God said. God still promises to make a way for a ninety-nine year old man and a ninety-year old woman to have a baby. God will make a way for the vision to become a reality. Even when everything about us screaming, "It can't be done," God will make a way.

Maybe, when you were thinking a minute ago, you imagined a world where elders are honored and valued. But what about all the issues of population numbers and vast health-care problems and the cost? How can it be? God will make a way.

Maybe you imagined a world where everyone has enough to eat. But what about all the delivery systems and the farming economics and corruptions in systems? How can it be? God will make a way.

Maybe you imagined a world without bombs and gun violence and deep-seated hatred. But what about – maybe not even start with that one. How can it be? God will make a way.

Maybe you imagined a world where people are loved and honored, and not judged by their skin color, or sexual orientation, or gender. But what about hate groups, and systemic injustice and implicit prejudice? How will we ever get there? How? Everybody?

*"God will make a way."*

It doesn't mean that it won't be hard work for us. It doesn't mean it won't take a lifetime or longer. It doesn't mean that it will ever seem possible. But God will make a way for God's good future to come.

Abram, now Abraham, was not faithful because he left home and wandered all over the Middle East. He was faithful because he kept God's vision of a future before him, even when it seemed impossible. He was willing to trust that God would make a way. In the midst of all else, he trusted that God would make a way.

God is faithful. God's promises are real and everlasting. We've heard the promises, like "*I am with you,*" like "*I will strengthen you.*" "*I will give you hope and a future.*" "*I will raise you up.*" "*My steadfast love shall not depart from you.*" "*Nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.*"

These all seem crazy or impossible. But God is good at impossible. And Saint Paul said, "[God] *gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.*" If we can't find a way, God will create a way.

What might God do with us if we are willing to be open to God's future? What if we trusted in God's faithfulness? What if we imagined what might come, even if we can't imagine how? What might God do with us if we are willing to stretch our imaginations to what could be, what might be, as God makes a way? What might happen if we trust the promise?

Amen.