

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Genesis 12:1-5a
SERMON SERIES: Transforming Journeys
SERMON TITLE: The Journey of Abram & Sarai

During this season of Lent, our focus is going to be on *Transforming Journeys*. Life is often compared to a journey. In fact, I think it's fair to say that life is made up of a series of journeys that change us and shape us.

The biblical story certainly reflects this dynamic of life. And of course, in the biblical story, God is often involved both as the instigator of many of life's transforming journeys and as a traveling companion. So over these next weeks, we'll be looking at various biblical "journeys" and how they inform our own travels through life.

This morning we begin in the book of Genesis with the journey of Abram and Sarai. I'm reading from Genesis 12:1-5a. Listen for the word of God. **SCRIPTURE LESSON.**

So let me ask you: Have you ever taken a transforming journey in your life? If you have, how was God involved? How did the journey change you? What did you have to leave behind in order to experience transformation? What difficulties had to be overcome along the way? What blessings did you receive? How did that transforming journey become a blessing to others?

The transforming journey of Abram and Sarai began with a call from God. God said to Abram: *Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house*. To make this journey, Abram literally had to leave home. He and his wife Sarai were living in Haran—a very prosperous city that was a center for religion, politics and commerce. The surroundings were familiar and comfortable. Family, friends and neighbors were there. Some measure of safety and security were found at home, especially when compared to the life of a nomad wandering

from place to place. But home and even country had to be relinquished and left behind for transformation to take place.

And these two didn't even know where they were going! God said ***Go...to the land that I will show you.*** No GPS, no map, no schedule, no itinerary—just ***go!*** They had to trust God to be their guide. We find out later that their destination was Canaan.

And then there was a promise: ***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. 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.***

What a magnificent promise! Who wouldn't want to be blessed like this? Who wouldn't want to be blessing to all the families of the earth? But notice: The promise is tied to the going—to the leaving—to the departure. For the promise to be fulfilled, Abram and Sarai had to leave home and move forward into a promised future.

And that's what they did: ***So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go the land of Canaan.***

What a transforming journey this was to be. Blessings came in abundance: covenants made; worship offered; prosperity enjoyed; and children born, including the child of promise named Isaac.

But all was not easy. There was famine and a trip Egypt; Abram's deception of Pharaoh to protect Sarai; a separation from Lot; battles fought against invading kings; Sarai's continued barrenness in light of the promise; a child born of a maidservant, then both sent away into the desert; the destruction of Sodom and Gemorrah; another act of deception on Abram's part; a

name change from Abram (*the exalted father*) to Abraham (*the father of many*); the child of promise put at risk on Mount Moriah by his father's own hand; the death of Sarai, then known as Sarah; a new wife and six more sons for Abraham; and finally, Abraham's own death.

Theirs was a transforming journey with God—a journey that began when they left home and family—and a journey that continued to challenge them to deeper faith as they over and over again let go of valued attachments and relationships for the sake of moving forward with God into the promised future. And along the way, they had to learn how to deal with God's blessing and the responsibility of becoming a blessing to all the families of the earth.

So what do you think? Have you ever taken one of these transforming journeys in your life? I have. In fact, I've been on more than one. This is an example: Back in August of 1970, my mom and my dad and I loaded up our Ford LTD with as many of my earthly possessions as we cram into the car around the three of us, and we struck out on a 500 mile journey from my home in Beeville to Texas Tech University in Lubbock. For the first time in my 18 years of life, I was moving away from the town in which I was born and raised; I was leaving behind two younger brothers, my grandmother, two aunts, two uncles, and most every friend I had in the world. And once we got to Lubbock, I would be saying goodbye to my mom and dad as well.

Now the truth is, I had been looking forward to this move for awhile. I was ready to get away from home—to get out on my own. But I've got to tell you, as I stood there in the parking lot of the Carpenter Hall dorm at Texas Tech and watched my mom and dad drive away; I got a knot in the pit of my stomach and this overwhelming feeling of loneliness swept over me. It dawned on me that I was leaving home; I was leaving a comfortable, familiar place—a place of safety and security—for this brand new place far away from home that I really knew very little

about. And I was leaving behind people who knew me and loved me. I didn't know a soul in Lubbock.

Now I'll be honest with you, in that moment of saying goodbye, I was scared to death, but at the same time, I knew I was doing what I needed to do to grow up. The truth is, in one way or another, I needed to leave home and my family to discover who I was and what God had in store for me.

And there were certainly blessings along the way: I made new friends; I learned a lot; I discovered that I could handle some important responsibilities; I had some great experiences with the Tech band; and I made progress in making my faith my own.

But the journey wasn't always easy. During the five years I was at Tech, I struggled in some classes; I changed my major; my heart was broken once or twice (in a romantic sort of way); my grandmother died; my roommate was arrested for possession of marijuana and for the first time in my life I had to deal with the police, a search warrant, a room search and a friend in jail; I was in a car wreck that sent me to the emergency room in an ambulance; and to top it off, during my last year in Lubbock, a fraternity brother came to me one night and told me that he was going to kill himself.

In the midst of all of this, I did a lot of growing up—my life was shaped and changed, and I discovered that God was indeed a companion on this transforming journey. Being so far away from home and family, I think I learned to look for God and to trust God in ways that I had never done before while I was at home. And after all of these years, I'm still looking for opportunities to use the experiences from that transforming journey in ways that bless other people.

Now thanks to this old story about Abram's and Sarai's transforming journey, and given my own experience and the fact that I've made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ on a journey of deepening discipleship, I'm all the time asking myself questions like these: In what ways do I still need "to leave home?" What do I need to leave behind in order to grow—to change—to move forward into God's promised future? How am I being blessed on this transforming journey? And how can these blessing be used to bless others?

It seems to me that these are good Lenten questions. So when it comes to questions like these, how do you respond? I give you the gift of silence to consider your response.