

GO IN TRUST

Genesis 12:1-9

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For the next several weeks, we are going to be reading, talking and thinking about the word, “GO”. Inspiration for this worship series comes from the United Church of Christ stewardship theme for the year which is “Go and do the same” - that verse comes from the parable of the Good Samaritan which we’ll be looking at in a few weeks. But it was not hard to find other passages in the Bible which mention the word “go”. Throughout the Bible, we see God’s people on the move.

The most significant and longest journey is the 40-year walk through the desert which Moses led as the people of Israel found their way to the promised land. But there are many other journeys, some of them long, some of them short; some of them physical, some of them metaphorical. All of them spiritual journeys.

Travel has always involved an element of risk. In biblical times, the risk was different than it is today. There was no hospitality industry in the ancient middle east. There were no hostels or inns, no signs to tell you where you could find your next meal. No AAA to provide roadside assistance. Anyone traveling, whether rich or poor, was dependent upon the kindness of strangers. Hospitality is lifted up as an important virtue in the Bible for many reasons, but for one, hospitality made the difference between life and death for travelers. Remember that when we talk about the geography of the Bible, much of the land was desert. Finding people to supply you water on your journey wasn’t just nice; it was essential.

When I was in Israel in January, I was struck by how far Jesus regularly traveled. Israel isn’t a large country. It’s 8,000 square miles, 1/5 the size of Ohio. But the first journey of the New Testament, the journey Joseph and Mary took from Nazareth to Bethlehem was a journey

of 70 miles. That's a long walk. That's a long ride on a donkey for someone nine months pregnant. And it's a journey Jesus took numerous times. From the Sea of Galilee region, down to the Jerusalem region, and back again. And when he went up to Caesarea Philippi, that was further north. We know he spent time in the Dead Sea region, which was further south. When you consider that most of this travel was on foot, it's impressive the distances Jesus covered. He was always on the go.

Before we talk about Abram, the central character in today's passage, let me remind you of all that happens in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. We have the two creation stories, the story of Adam and Eve in the garden, Cain and Abel, and already by chapter six, people have disobeyed God's commandments, greatly disappointing God to the extent that there is a great flood, survived only by Noah and his family. God promises to never again destroy so much of the earth. Chapter 11 gives us the Tower of Babel story, a strange and confusing story which leaves us wondering where God is at work in the chaos of the world. And that question is answered in chapter 12. God is at work in the world through one individual, Abram, soon to be one family. Through this family God will make a nation, a people, who will be set aside, set apart.

The first word God speaks to Abram is the word, "Leave." Leave everything you've known. Leave your country, leave your relatives, leave this home that your father gave you, the home you grew up in, and go." "Go where?", Abram likely wondered. "Oh, I'll show you," says God, as if that's a minor detail.

Here's what we know about Abram. Though the number 75 is not to be taken literally, it's a way of saying that he was not a young man. He is married to Sarai. They have in their household also their nephew Lot.

God says to Abram, "I am going to make a great nation, beginning with you. I'm going to bless you." And so Abram, Sarai and Lot pack up. And they travel. From Haran, which is the

border of Turkey and Syria, to Shechem, which is in the west bank. The distances are not mentioned in the Bible. It reads very matter-of-factly: “They departed for Canaan...when they arrived there, Abram went as far as the sanctuary at Shechem...” It was a 400 mile trip.

They traveled on trust.

For Abram, the trust was in the blessing. God promises a better future, not a future of privilege or financial success, not a future of power or prestige or comfort. But a future of meaning and purpose. The blessing is often misunderstood. When we say that the Jews were “the chosen people”, that doesn’t mean that they are God’s favorite, loved above others. It means that they are chosen for a purpose. They are, as the saying goes, “blessed to be a blessing.” They are set apart as an example for others to follow. God takes a small group of people, not because God likes them best, but because God loves ALL people, wants the best for all people, wants every community and nation to experience healing, harmony, wholeness - the Hebrew word “shalom.” You can almost hear God saying, “Let me try it with a small group of people, then maybe others can see how it’s done.” So with this group of people, God is going to give rules to follow, God is going to raise up leaders, and if the results are good, the hope is that others will want to emulate their example.

It all starts with Abram, who says “Yes” when God says “Go.”

In the Bible, “blessing” is always communal; it’s never private, individual, personal. Blessing is always for the sake of a greater good. People who have been blessed are also blessed with responsibility to share with they have with others: whether that is time, talent, treasure or any combination. Jesus puts it this way in the New Testament: “To whom much is given, much will be required.”

Like Abram, we can trust that when God calls us to something, God will equip us for that task. God doesn’t call us to ministries or challenges or projects that are beyond our grasp.

Sometimes we are called by God to GO- and we may choose to make a faithful, risk-taking leap into the unknown. It may be a new job, a new relationship, a new project, a new home. We discern that the call is from God. We take our time, not too much time but we're not impulsive either. We talk to others whose advice we trust. And then we step out, into a new world which is somewhat unknown, somewhat foreign.

But other times we GO because there is literally no other choice. We all have stepped into the technology age. Some of us have gone there kicking and screaming. We each make the decision about how much technology we ourselves want to use. But we all live there. There is no choice about it.

I'm pretty good about change, personally. I think it helps that I moved several times when I was young. But I have been very reluctant to acknowledge the fact that we now live in the world of Sunday sports. I wish it weren't so. I wish that Sunday morning was still an unscheduled spot in the week, but I have finally come to accept that reality. It is a waste of energy for me to complain about it.

We had a wonderful meeting here Tuesday night of our Moms Group. Many of the women in the group are struggling mightily with the pressures that are placed on families today. They want their children to live well-balanced lives, they want their children to have sports and music and free time and church. But the balance goes away quickly. One soccer team becomes two. The tournaments multiply. It's very hard to say "no" for a whole host of reasons. I admire our parents who want so much for their children's lives to be whole, for their family lives to have a sense of that peace and wholeness that the Bible calls "shalom." Everything in our society is working against them. Our hope is that by working together and forming strong relationships with each other, we will be able to make some headway in making changes and supporting one another in those difficult decisions. It's a trusting way to live. Telling the truth of

our lives to one another, asking for help and advice. Listening to the ways each person finds to take a step forward in faith.

Sometimes we go somewhere in life that we never ever would have chosen. We find ourselves on a path called “widowhood”. We find ourselves living in a land called “unemployed.” We end up in a wilderness called “chronic pain.” No one chooses these journeys. But lives take these detours. We find ourselves in new territory. It feels foreign and strange and we want nothing more than to go home again.

I met with someone this summer whose life took a chaotic turn. She says that every day when she wakes up, she has a very brief experience of happiness. Then her mind clicks on and she remembers, “Oh, I don’t live in that happy place anymore. I live in a place where a tragedy has occurred. I want nothing more than to go back to sleep and wake up in a world where I can feel happy again.”

It is hard to trust in God when you wake up every morning in pain - physical pain, psychic pain, emotional, spiritual anguish. The truth is that God has entered that new territory with you. Even though you don’t want to be there, God has accompanied you. God will not leave your side. And God will equip you to live there, providing the strength, the courage, the stamina, the encouragement and the hope that you will need.

Go in trust. Know that there is nowhere you will go where God will not be. God is called the alpha and the omega, the Greek words for the first letter of the alphabet and the last. We sing, “As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.” God is from all time and for all time and in all places. When we are in the waiting room, God is there. When we are in the emergency room, God is there. On the sidelines of the soccer game, in the carpool pick up line, God is there. There is nowhere we find ourselves where God has not accompanied us.

In the person and story of Jesus, God chose to become a part of human life, so that we would never again feel alone. God knows what our lives are like, and so calls us to live in trust.