

+++ In the Name of Jesus +++

Title: “Abraham’s Journey—and Faith”

Date: Sunday, March 1, 2026 (Second Sunday in Lent, series A)

Text: Genesis 12:1-9

¹ The LORD had said to Abram,

‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

² I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶ Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he went on towards the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

⁹ Then Abram set out and continued towards the Negev.

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Wasn’t that something, all the travel problems many people had last weekend when the airport in Puerto Vallarta was shut down? Some people were stranded here in Canada—even, I heard, in a few cases, on planes that were waiting on the tarmac for takeoff. Thousands more were stranded in Mexico, with no easy or obvious way to get home. Until it all got worked out, a couple days later, a lot of people were wondering, “How am I ever going to get from *here* to *there*, anyway?”

As we think about Abraham’s journey from his homeland into the Promised Land—and then also about our own journey into the Kingdom of God—may the Holy Spirit enlighten us, and teach us (with fresh eyes and open hearts) to *trust* the Lord as he guides us all the way along life’s road, to our final destination in his presence.

So then, Abraham. His journey was *literal*—a *physical* trip from Point A to Point B. *His* trip though was complicated by the fact that he didn’t have any idea at the outset, where Point B *was*! Remember what the Lord told him, in the opening verse of our Old Testament reading? “**Go from your country, your people, and your father’s household, to the land I will show you.**” (v.1) But where in the world *was* that, anyway? Imagine what it would be like to start out on a really long trip on that basis, not only by yourself but with your spouse... and your nephew... and all of your combined households’ worth of stuff... plus a bunch of other family members too. And all you can say, when somebody asks you where you’re going, is, “I don’t know!” Really? Can you imagine the stress that would have caused *everyone*, for however long this journey lasted?

We don’t know how many days that was, either. Considering how far they ended up going, it must have taken months just to cover the *part* of the trip that’s described here in this reading (never mind the later parts too, which eventually took them all the way down to Egypt).

Their starting-place was Haran, in central Turkey. According to Google, the distance from Haran to Shechem (the first major stop our reading tells us about) is 1,007 kilometers—which Google

thinks should take 14 hours and 8 minutes to drive. Personally, I think that's probably a little optimistic, given that most of the route is in Syria, which isn't exactly known these days for smooth or efficient road-trips. On foot (which was of course the way Abraham was travelling), the route is a little shorter—815 kilometers—which Google thinks is about 166 hours of walking. I did the math though, and that's based on a speed of almost 5 kilometers an hour, which seems a little optimistic, given the size and makeup of Abraham's party (which included both animals and kids), as well as the fact that (again) they *didn't* really seem to know where they were going!

What was it, then, that *kept* them going? Two things. First, God's promises. It's possible of course that the Lord had *other* conversations with Abraham too, besides these two little snippets we're listening-in on, here in this reading. But it's significant to note that pretty much the whole content of both of these little blurbs is a *one-way* set of promises: God, to Abraham. True, the first speech starts out with a *command* (“Go!”)—but the *reason* Abraham is supposed to go is because God was *promising* to “**make him into a great nation, and bless him, and make his name great, so he would be a blessing... to all the peoples on earth.**” (vv.2-3) Then, however much later it was that they finally got to Shechem (a little farther into this reading), God also gave Abraham a further promise—this one, of real-estate: “**To your offspring I will give this land.**” (v.7)

In a way, all of those promises probably strike us as being a little, well, “fluffy,” eh? They remind me, anyway, of those emails many of us used to get, from Nigerian millionaires who just couldn't find anybody else in their own family or city or country to give their money to! But somehow, they found out about *us*, and—bingo!—it was *all* going to be ours!

I wonder if Abraham had moments of doubt along the way, whether or not *these* promises too were legit. I suspect he did! But somehow, those promises were still “enough” to keep powering him along, step by step. Maybe it was because he sensed the *character* of the person who made those promises (even more than the content of those promises themselves). All we're *told* is that it was *the Lord* who “**spoke to Abram,**” the first time. (v.1) How Abram even *knew* it was the Lord who was speaking to him at that point, we have no idea. But later on, we hear that “**the Lord appeared to Abram,**” too, when he spoke to him the second time. Somehow, through that speaking *and* appearing, God obviously succeeded in convincing Abraham that *no*, he *wasn't* an internet scam-artist, but a God who Abraham could trust. True, the money hadn't quite landed in his bank account yet—and for that matter, it wouldn't even be him, personally, as much as his descendants, who got the *full* benefit out of all of these blessings. But the promises themselves were obviously both attractive enough, and plausible enough, to keep Abraham going—step after step, mile after mile. As our second reading (from Romans) puts it, Abraham *somehow* came to understand—and cling to—the fact that “**the God in whom he believed**” was a God who really could “**give life to the dead**” and “**call into being, things that did not yet exist.**” (Rom 4:17)

And *that*, you see, was the second thing that kept Abraham going: his *trust* in God's promises. Curiously, this isn't really something our first reading itself talks about, at all. It's only three chapters *later* in the book of Genesis that we're told “**Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord credited that faith to him as righteousness.**” (15:6) Even here, though, the *idea* of trust is implied in the very fact of Abraham's obedience—the fact that he *does* “get up and go,” and follow God. *That's* why our second reading from Romans chapter 4 is shot-through with this idea of trust—

- not only when it quotes that famous line about “**Abraham believing the Lord**” (from Genesis 15)
- but also when it goes on to tell us directly that Abraham “**trusted**” God,
- and that he relied on “**faith**”,

- and, again, when it sums up this whole crazy story by saying that Abraham “**believed in... the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that do not even yet exist.**”

In English, the connections between some of those bits are hard to spot, because our words for “**trusting**,” “**believing**,” and “**having faith**” are different. But in the Greek that Paul was writing this in, all those terms come from the same root. You can hear the same sounds in all of them: **ἐπίστευσεν, πιστεύοντι, ἐκ πίστεως, ἐπίστευσεν**. The common idea behind all of those words is *trust*.

And *trust*, you see, is how Martin Luther describes the whole idea of having a god in the first place. When Luther asks in the Large Catechism, “**What is it to have a god?**,” this is the first part of his answer: “**A god is that from which we expect all good, and in which we take refuge in all distress. So, to have a god is nothing other than trusting and believing him with our whole heart... Whatever you set your heart, and put your trust in, is truly your God.**”

Obviously, Luther also acknowledges that there is this further sense, too, of “**believing**” God. You and I *do* take his Word seriously, and accept what the Bible tells us as truth. That’s why Luther has no problem setting “belief” right alongside “trust,” in many places in his writings. But underneath all of those particular things we *believe*, is this deeper foundation of *trust*—which is even more about God’s *character* than the things he tells us. Do you see the difference? “Belief” has to do with the *content* of what God says. So, YES, Abraham believed that God would do for him each of those specific things God had promised him (making him a great nation, and blessing him, and causing him to be a blessing, and giving him the land of Canaan). But underneath all of those specific beliefs, Abraham *trusted* God in a broader sense as well—even for problems and situations that hadn’t come up yet! He knew he could approach *whatever* came with confidence, because” he knew who the guy on the other side of the table from him *was*.” That’s trust.

If I had to pick, I think this *second* factor (of *trust*) is what *really* kept Abraham and his crew going, all the way from Haran to Canaan. As valuable as the content of God’s *promises* was, Abraham’s trust in who *God* was, was even more important.

And that, you see, is why Paul makes this crazy-sounding claim (near the end of our second reading) that Abraham is “**the father of us all.**” (Rom 4:16) I suppose there might be a sense in which that’s true for *some* of us on the *literal* level (meaning, if we’re Jewish). But those Christians Paul was writing to, were *not* all Jewish. Some were, but a lot of them weren’t, and it was to all of them together that Paul says, “**Abraham is the father of us all**”—why?—*not* because they shared Abraham’s *bloodline*, but because they trusted Abraham’s God. I’m going to substitute the word “trust” in place of all of those other terms (like “faith” and “believing”) that we find in our printed translation—and with that one change, listen again to Paul’s words in this very last bit of this reading: “**Therefore,**” Paul says, “[God’s] promise comes by *trusting*, so that it may be by grace, and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are ‘of’ the Law [that is, the Jews], but also to those who have the *trust* of Abraham. He is the father of us all.” (Rom 4:16)

Thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, you and I do have that same trust that Abraham had. Don’t we? Maybe you noticed in today’s Gospel reading, how important the work of the Holy Spirit is, in bringing us into the Kingdom of God. (John 3:5) That’s not a physical journey, but a spiritual one—both in the *lower-case* sense, because it takes place invisibly, and in the *upper-case* sense that it’s the Holy Spirit (the “capital-S Spirit”) who carries us along, *out* of this world and *into* God’s kingdom.

In that sense, it’s too bad that most of our English translations (including the one we’re using today) translate a key word in this reading as if Jesus was using that word (**ἄνωθεν**) to talk about “**being born again.**” That’s how we’re pretty much *always* used to hearing this idea expressed, but

what that translation implies is that the key part of becoming a Christian has to do with *time*—somehow going back to our original birth in the normal sense, and going through that process *again*. That's what *Nicodemus* assumes Jesus is talking about: “What, I'm supposed to go back into my mother's womb and be born *again*?” But the way Jesus responds, makes it clear that no, that's not what he really meant, at all. Jesus was using that word ἄνωθεν in its *other* sense, as a way of talking about “**being born from above**” (not “**born again**”)—not receiving life *a second time*, but receiving a new kind of life that comes *from a different place*: not just life from the earth, but life from heaven. That's why Jesus goes on, later in this reading, to say, “**Flesh gives birth to flesh, and the Spirit gives birth to spirit.**” (v.6) Those are totally different *kinds* of life, aren't they?—*fleshly* life that comes from the visible world, and *trusts* only what it can *see*, and *Spiritual* life that comes from God, and *trusts* (even more) what is *unseen*.

Well, it's time to tie this all together. How's this, as summary of all three of these readings?

- First, it was because Abraham was “**born from above**” that he *trusted* God to lead him all the way from Haran to the Promised Land.
- Then, it was because Paul and those Christians in Rome were also “**born from above,**” that they could look back on Abraham as their “**father**” and recognize that they, too, had exactly the same *trust* in God's gracious care, that Abraham had had.
- And now, it's because you and I have been “**born from above**” (through the work of the Holy Spirit) that we too find comfort, hope, and confidence in Abraham's example of trust.

The God who called Abraham to make that crazily uncertain journey from Haran to the promised land—he is the same God who calls you and me, too, to *trust* him as he leads *us* all the way home to heaven. And because he *still is* “**the God who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence things that do not even exist,**” we *can* and *do* trust him—every step of the way. Thanks be to God! Amen.