

A couple of weeks ago,
I said that I almost always
preach on the Gospel reading
appointed for the day.
Almost always.

In our ordination vows,
priests promise to proclaim the Gospel.
While there are many ways
rightly to interpret that promise,
I generally also take it literally -

It's an obligation.
As a Christian priest,
when I preach,
I feel I should mostly focus on
the words and actions of Jesus.

It's also a discipline -
if I stick to the Gospel on Sundays,
Then I don't avoid the difficult
or troubling things that Jesus
says or does.
Sometimes, though,
I choose a different path.

Today is one of those days,
and I promise this has nothing to do
with trying to avoid John 3.
You might remember
I resisted the temptation
to preach on the Old Testament
last week.
This Sunday, I gave in.

Today, The Lord first appears to Abram -
this is the beginning of the story,
of the covenant relationship
into which God calls Abram,
and, through him,
the whole people of Israel.

The first 11 chapters of Genesis,
have been a sort of introduction
to who God is,
and to what God's relationship

to creation is meant to be.
It's background
for what we hear today.

Three things I want us to notice -
first, how sparse this account is.
Other than his father's name,
where he is from,
and that he is a 10th generation
descendant of Noah,
We know very little of Abram,
or of why God chose him.

There's no logical reason,
when "The Lord" appears to him,
out of nowhere,
that he should have responded,
like he does.

Later on in the story,
when God asks Abram to do
something drastic,
he at least has questions -
think of Sodom and Gomorrah.
If there is any such conversation here,
we aren't privy to it.

Look at what it says -
Get up and go from your country,
your kindred, and your father's house,
to the land that I will show you,
So Abram went,
as the Lord had told him.

That's it. No other details -
God does promise
That he will bless Abram,
and make his name great,
and that all the families of the earth
will be blessed through him,
but there's nothing else -
no evidence to support these claims,
no reason that Abram
should believe him,
but he does.

God doesn't even tell him
where he's going -
the land that I *will show you.
In other words,
you start walking - somewhere
and when you get there,
well, I'll tell you to stop.

First thing about faith -
there is no certainty involved;
we seldom get to know
what God is doing,

When God asks us,
to come along for the ride.
That should make us all a little wary.

Second point -
God doesn't ask Abram
to agree to specifics,
He doesn't ask for a confession of faith,
He doesn't ask Abram what he
believes about who God is.

Because that's not
what biblical faith looks like.
Abram just packs up
and goes.
He just starts walking.

In this case, Faith is not about feelings,
nor is it a question of what we think,
or if we can calculate
the odds of success -
maybe that's why
There's no record of a conversation -

Faith is about action -
it is what we do,
much more that what we think,
or what we say.

Ever heard that saying -
I'm sorry, your actions
were speaking so loudly,
I couldn't hear what you were saying?

Or my own personal favorite,
and one appropriate to today's reading,
does the tongue in your mouth,
match the one in your shoe?

Final point,
and of all them,
this may be the one
we need to spend the most
time considering,
if we're serious
about being disciples,
About being followers of Jesus.

Look what God tells Abram
to leave behind -
go from your country,
and your kindred,
and your father's house.

This should resonate with Southerners-
think about the way
we talk to each other,
when we first meet -

Where are you from?
Oh, I grew up here,
maybe you know my parents -
Roger and Bonnie.

Oh, wait are you related to
these other Kellys?

It's how we find out
who each other is;
it's how we see,
if we're connected
to one another.

That's what God tells Abram
to leave behind,
literally everything that tells him,
who he is -
where he lives,
who his people are,

the land where his ancestors
are buried.

God asks Abram to give up
the life he has known
in exchange for a new life
about which he knows nothing.
Actually, God asks him to give it up
just for the *promise of a new life,
And Abram does.

And these are the questions
for us to ponder -
if we are committed to
following Jesus,
what will it cost us?

And whatever that may be,
are we willing to let go of it,
to just leave it behind?

Odds are,
it won't be nearly as much
as God asked of Abram,
but it might still feel
a little like everything.

What we need to remember,
of course,
is that Jesus does not ask more of us,
than he was willing to sacrifice himself.
He *did give up his life,
in more ways than one,
not for his own sake,
but for ours.

Lent is a time of repentance,
of turning around,
and going in the other direction.

I suggested earlier,
that repentance could mean
turning away from,
but it could also mean turning towards.

Today that's how I hear
the call of Abram -
God calls Abram to turn towards him,
which means turning away
from what he knew.

So what then does God call us
to let go of,
as we choose to turn
more fully towards Him?

What do we hold onto now,
that might stand in the way of
following the call of Jesus?

Now, we have the benefit of knowing,
how Abram's story turns out -
God *does keep those promises
He makes in today's reading,

And He does give Abraham,
far more than He asked him
to give up,
even if it takes longer
than Abram expected.

So we have far more reason to trust now,
than Abraham did at the time.

Still, the decision is ever
before us.
God never makes us do anything,
any more than Jesus forced
anyone to follow him
on the road to the cross.

We are offered only an invitation,
an opportunity to join our lives,
to the life of the One who is,
and who was,
and who is to come.

If we choose to accept
that invitation,
today's story tells us
what it might cost us,

But the story of faith,
the faith of Abraham,
and that of Jesus - it doesn't end,
with what we read today,
and if we're willing to go along,
to follow the story the whole way,

We'll come to see,
what God will give us in return,
the hope of salvation,
and the promise of eternal life.