

**Sermons from Archwood United Church of Christ  
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**Genesis 12: 1-9  
"Got to Get Going"**

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In the small town where I went to school, there were only 30 students in my class – not my classroom, the whole entire grade for the town and every kid my age for 10-15 miles in every direction around it. But, hey, that was big stuff. My sister and brother went to a literal *Little House in the Prairie*-type one-room school house until they were in sixth and eighth grade. Going to a "town-school" rocked their world. For the most part, those I started school with were the same 30 with whom I graduated. We never even changed buildings because kindergarten to senior high was all in the same building. It may have been hard to go from 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 7<sup>th</sup> grade because we liked the teachers better, or to go from having a desk to having a locker, but the change was prescribed and safe. It made sense, a logical progression. And it made sense for me to go off and move to college, and then to move to Minneapolis for seminary. It was just part of what you did. But, after that is when moving around changed from making sense to following a calling, from a logical progression with a small group of classmates to a choice that could leave you alone, with people wondering what in the world you are doing. Inner-city Cleveland is a long way from rural North Dakota. But it didn't happen in one move; it was in stages. Since leaving home I have lived in 19 different places, the longest right next door. My father, on the other hand, was born in the bedroom of the house he lived in until he was 65 years old. Abram started moving when he was 75.

This story from Genesis got me thinking about decisions to move around, whether you were on your own or with your friends, whether the decision to move made sense or not... Most of us have moved at some point – not necessarily from another city to Cleveland but from one class to the next, one house to another, from one job to new one. Almost everyone here has moved from one church to another. Sacrifices are made, relationships are affected, security is uprooted. It's harder when it doesn't make complete sense, but either

way, even what we consider an easy decision is something we often resist. Yet if God is calling, not answering isn't a good idea either. Sometimes we answer right away; but most of time God has to keep at it, calling, calling, calling...Go where I tell you. It doesn't sound like Abram had to be told twice; at least it doesn't so in the text. God said "go" and Abram got going. He was told, "Leave your father's house and go to a land I will show you." It wasn't logical and it wasn't even to a specific place. God just said "go" and Abram got going. Say (got going).

We, on the other hand, probably need a little more information, a little more time to consider our options. Where are the kids going to go to school? What are the housing prices like? It truly doesn't make sense to just pick up everything, uproot your family... We've got to look out for our best interests. But, if God is calling, doesn't God know more about what's in your best interest than you? But, you're right. It isn't that easy. Or is it? Do we just make everything hard? I'm just thinking about how Abram got going and his resistance, or lack of it...

Is it time for us to get going? Have we been procrastinating something so long that it's true? We just need to get going, at least to the next stage? Don't take this too lightly or dismiss it too quickly. Is there something today that you've been thinking – I just need to do it? I've got to pick up the classifieds. I've got to get to the doctor and check this thing out. I've got to find some counseling. I've got to call my friend and tell her I'm sorry. I've got to go back to school. I've got to make out a will. Things we've got to do but just don't. I've got to get going on what God has been trying to get me going on. What? I've just got to get going. What has God been saying to you? What have you been saying back?

There are several things we say in response to God:

God calls and we say: "I know" but then never do anything

God calls and we say: "I knew this day would come" – excited or frightened

God calls and we say: "Why in the world would I do that?"

God calls and we say: "OK, but...here's the deal"

At some point, I've felt all those responses. Variations of "are you crazy" to "uh oh;" shades of knowing God is right to trying to bargain. I can't imagine a situation in which I made some life-changing decision the first time I heard it. I'm skeptical, but Abram just got going. Tell your neighbor (he just got going).

Why? He heard God calling. Is it that simple? Well, he was listening. We can listen for God in lots of ways – we can look for signs, we can trust our sense of intuition, we can hear God in the voices of our friends and sometimes our enemies... The one way we will never hear God is for us to never shut up. How do we *know* it's God? We can listen in lots of ways – we can look for signs, we

can trust our sense of intuition...and we ask questions. And here we come to our Lenten question: What really matters? If God is trying to get us to get going, it will be for something that matters. Is it God calling if what we are going to get from the change is more money, or greater luxury, or a bigger nest, or more things? And if the change we are called to really does bring us more wealth – a better job, a better education – is it so we can do more for our self or so we will be able expand our horizons, to do more for others, to be more generous, to have more time for others. Who is being served by what we think we are hearing? If it ain't God, it ain't worth it. The ability to buy a 42" plasma big screen TV isn't the answer to what really matters; God's voice is probably not the one telling you to tell off your boss. Where is our will in what we *want* and where is God's will in what we will *gain*? God voice, when we listen, can be found in such questions.

Abram was indeed promised greater wealth, a better name, and more influence; but, in the end, for who? Verse 2 says, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great." But, for what reason? Do you remember what I read earlier? It says, "So you will *be* a blessing," and concludes in verse 3 by saying, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Abram, by his going to a new land, is promised to be a blessing. So, he got going because he heard God calling; and, thankfully, he got going because what he heard was that he was a promise for someone to be blessed. God promised a new land. I don't know what was wrong with the old land, but it's true that sometimes there is something about where we are today that isn't right. It's been true for me that where I was physically, emotionally, spiritually, I was not in the right place for a promise to be lived through me. There were things I had to do to make a change.

I think it was quite a severe test to think Abram would have to give up something or someplace that wasn't so bad. I would think, will God be faithful to this promise? Is it something I *think* I heard or I *know* I heard or I *want* to hear? But he moved into that vulnerability of the unknown land, that place where all Abram could do was depend on God. He hadn't been there before, and there was no one who would, or could, know where God was leading them. His family and friends didn't know. At least Abram had heard directly from God. Imagine his family traveling with all their possessions because God told Abram to do so, going on a journey to an unknown place without even a clue as to where it would end. Is this where we are staying? Are we there yet? But, notice, too, what they did in each place that they stopped at for a while. They built an altar to honor God. Even as they were moving around, they made sure to center themselves spiritually, which if you are listening for God is a really good idea. Don't forget that in the middle of your changes. Don't be *too* quick to get going. Once we've gotten going, we still have to keep listening.

Abram got going because he heard God calling; and he moved along because he was promised to be a blessing. Now, here's something important. Please, listen to this. He didn't do it because it was a solution to a problem he had or a way of escaping. Unresolved issues where we are right now have a way of tagging along to any new place. Is it the *co-worker* who is driving you crazy or your way of dealing with other people? Is your *spouse or partner* the problem you need to change or your insecurity and expectations? Just examples... Tension and conflict are not resolved by simply moving on – from relationships at home or on your job or at your church. Or, the tension we feel about who we are. If the only promise we are looking for is how we can ignore or avoid something, it might not be God calling, though we might *wish* it was.

Now, in fact, God may tell us to get going or God may tell us to stay right where we are so we can finish what we started, clean up what we made, deepen relationships we may want to abandon, but whatever we do or wherever we go, let's get at it. Move or stay, it isn't the end of our journey. I love the fact that the Bible says Abram moved along by stages. Isn't that true for all of us? I lived in 16 different places before getting to Archwood, which when I look back now, seems to be where I was headed all along. It's not whether we get going or not, it's how; it's whether we are ultimately willing. There is no such thing as standing in one place if our faith is active. Faith is always calling us toward something – deeper, stronger, wider, forward.

So, if I were to say to you, today God is calling you to \_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank, such as, listen to your doctor, get a new job, write a letter to the editor, call the president, move to Africa to vaccinate children, become a pastor, adopt a child...fill in the blank with what you've been wrestling with), what would be your response?

"I know" but then never do anything

"I knew this day would come" – excited or frightened

"Why in the world would I do that?"

"OK, but...here's the deal"

Or how about this?

"It might not make sense, but if God is calling, and I'm listening, it must really matter."

Tell your neighbor (I've gotta get going)