

Take your compass, but forget the map

Message for Sunday, March 16, 2014
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-9

Children's Message: Let's pretend that I'm a boy named Paul.

Picking up various items, one by one. Sigh. I saved these, my favourite toys, for the last. *Put puppet on my hand, and speak in squeaky voice.* Hello, how are you today? Oh, not well. Let me give you a hug. *Puppet hugs me. Put puppet in a large box.*

Give the toy boomerang a weak throw, so that it doesn't come all the way back. Sigh. Put it in the box. I'm going to miss my room. I think of all the fun I've had here, playing with my toys, having friends sleep over. Now I have to leave it all behind.

My sister is packing up her room, and Mom and Dad are finishing packing downstairs. Mom got a new job in a town far from here; it takes *hours* to drive there. I'll probably never see my friends again. Mom's excited about the job: it's challenging, it's exactly what she trained for. Mom and Dad believe this is what God wants us to do. Nobody asked me if it's what I want to do.

Pile the remaining things in the box. I guess I better get going. All my other stuff is already loaded on the truck. I hate moving.

Ask the children: have you ever had to move? How did you feel about it?

A very long time ago, God decided to have a very special talk with Abram.

"I want you to leave your country, your family, and your father's house, and I want you to go into a land that I will show you."

Now they didn't have big moving trucks back in those days. Besides, God didn't even mention the NAME of the place! This would be a big step of FAITH for Abram and his wife Sarai. God wanted them to leave EVERYTHING, and EVERYBODY that they knew, and start over in a NEW land.

And Abraham and his wife Sarai did just as God told them. They trusted God.

Can you do that? Follow God's way, even though it may be difficult at times?

Message "Take your compass, but forget the map"

When I go on a wilderness hike, I always have a topographical map of the area. Using the map with a compass, I can keep track of where I am at any moment, and where my destination lies, so I never get lost. Going into the bush without a map is being totally irresponsible.

Living by faith is like going on a journey without a map. We have the compass, alright. God guides us by his Word, the Bible, and by the Holy Spirit. But we cannot tell what lies ahead. That's why I've entitled this message, "Take your compass, but forget the map."

We're going to go visit Abraham, who was a perfect example of this "living by faith."

We are going on an expedition through time and space. We program our ship's guidance computer to take us back almost 4,000 years. We set the coordinates to bring us down at the north-eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

There in the valley below us we see some tents. A family travelling south have set up camp for the night. We make our way down the hill, approaching the well the people have camped nearby. A slave is there, getting water for the animals.

He seems glad to see us. We talk for a few minutes about the weather. Then we ask him how is everyone.

[At this point, I put on a robe as a sign of changing characters. I now become the slave, in the first person.]

You're asking me how things are going?! I'll tell you, things are not going well at all.

My owner made me pack up everything his family owns. He said we had to get ready for a long journey. As a slave, I know I have to do whatever I'm told; but I'll tell you: this is going too far!

If my owner is crazy enough to leave a good home, that's his problem. But it's not fair that he should drag everyone else with him. Do you know what? I think the old fool doesn't even know where he is going!

Listen, can you keep a secret? ... *[whispering]* Nobody else knows this, but I'm thinking of running away from my master. I've lost all respect for the one I once loved to obey. The man is 75 years old. It's about time he became responsible and settled down.

But Abraham persists. He's told the family of a vision he had from God, telling him to leave home, for a better life elsewhere.

I've wondered at this. Is God really like that? All the stories I've heard about God said that God was like a prison guard, making sure that no one got out of hand.

The latest thing I hear is that God told Abraham that he would have many descendants... but look at Sarai his wife – like she's going to have children at her age! But Abraham believes God no matter what.

I've never known anyone who believed in God. Oh sure, me and all my buddies say, "Oh yeah, I believe in God." But with Abraham it's different. This man believes — *really believes!* He has faith in God.

We've been on the move through strange territory now for a couple of weeks. Even though it's crazy, so far everything has gone alright. Abraham says he has faith that God was leading us all the way. Again, there's that word he keeps on using: *faith*.

Maybe there is something real in all this. Maybe I won't not run away, at least not yet. I will stay, and try to learn more about this thing called faith. Maybe I could get to know God as well as Abraham.

[resume normal character as Bruce]

What exactly did Abraham have faith in God about?

God told Abraham to go away from his country, his relatives, his father's home. Where? How will he survive?

There were a number of promises which God gave Abraham to answer these questions and others:

- I will show you which land I am sending you to.
- I will make you into a great nation.
- I will bless you.
- I will make your name great.
- You will be a blessing.
- I will bless those who bless you.
- I will curse those who curse you.
- All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Abraham had faith that God was as good as his word. So he left his home, and went out to a strange new land, full of trust that he was with God.

When I look at this from the perspective of 40 centuries of history, I wonder if Abraham really knew what he was beginning.

- Did Abraham know that his life would be a turning point in the history of the world?
- Did he know that the nation his descendants would form would outlast even the mighty nations of his time?
- Did he know how important that nation would be in the affairs of the world?
- Did he know how very important that nation would be in the affairs of God?
- Did he know that God would actually become part of that nation in person, through Jesus Christ?
- Did he know that there would still be a Hebrew nation 4,000 years later?
- Did he know that millions and billions of people would learn from his example, to have faith in God?

Who knows what God told Abraham in his visions and dreams. All we know is that he had faith. He did not have all the answers, but had a total faith in God, and utter conviction that God had a purpose in his life.

I am going to repeat that last statement, because it is so vital:

Abraham did not have all the answers, but had a total faith in God, and utter conviction that God had a purpose in his life.

What about our situation, here in the Stirling area?

- We have faith in God also.
- We try to live out that faith in what we do each day.
- God calls us to trust in the promise that he will guide us.
- Do we know what will be the results of our faith? No. We don't have all the answers. We don't have the map. What we do need is a total faith in God, and utter conviction that God has a direction and a purpose in our lives.

Young people in school or college, and teachers training them: - do you have faith that you are preparing yourselves for some service where God can use you, somewhere in the world?

Parents raising families: you don't know all the answers about how to bring up children, but you struggle to do your best. Do you have faith that God is helping you in what may be the most important thing you will ever do in your life, shaping the lives of your children?

People in business or in government: do you have faith that God is working through you to help the people who depend upon your services?

Senior citizens and shut-ins: you may sometimes feel worthless, no good to anyone. Abraham and Sarah were 75 years old when God told them they still had work to do, and they still had faith to do it.

The fact that you have a lifetime of experience, and still hold to the conviction that you trust God – that is an inspiration to all the rest of us who harbour doubts at times.

All of us, whatever we do this week: do you have faith that we are part of a work which is much greater than we dare imagine? That people's lives are changed because of God working through us?

We do not have all the answers. But true faith is not based on finding answers. True faith is the belief that we as individuals, and together as a church, are not alone: God is with us. True faith is the utter conviction that God has a purpose for our journey.

Next Steps:

- Do you have doubts about God, about your faith? Of course you do! Everyone does! Things happen and you don't understand why. That's where doubts arise. The important thing is to doubt your doubts and believe your beliefs, rather than the other way around.
- Not sure where life is leading you? That's normal. The important thing is to trust that God is with you, and God has a purpose for your journey.