

Sermon Text for July 26, 2015

by

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Romans 4:16-25, Genesis 12:1-4a

“Stepping out of your comfort zone”

With our sermon title today it makes sense that we do something in order to make sure that you get at least a glimpse of what we are talking about when we talk about stepping out of our comfort zone. When you come into church how many of you find the pew, or at least the general vicinity of where you have sat in church for the last Sunday and the many Sundays before that? What if for today, again, just for today, we mixed it up a bit, just to get you out of your comfort zone and to begin to prove the point of what we find in our Scriptures today. God sometimes moves us out of our comfort zone not just so that we can be blessed abundantly, but, and this is key, others around us will be blessed. If we choose not to move out of our comfort zone then God is limited in how much he can bless us, and, this is probably more important, in most cases he is limited in how much he can bless those around us. So, as an object lesson who is the one person that you think of who has claimed his pew and has decided this is where he is going to sit. Joe, do you mind mixing things up a bit this morning and sitting in another spot away from where you are used? Choose any spot you like. Now, let's all get up and move to different places.

An embarrassing question that you can ask my kids is: “Where are you from”. Born in Italy, went to school in Florida, grew up in Russia and now living in Florida, you choose. How many of you from birth to now have lived in 5 or more places outside of Pennsylvania? For 13 years we moved every summer when I was growing up. I know something about picking up and settling down again. When I read this passage in Genesis about Abraham who is commanded to pick up and move, well it is a concept that not all of us can really relate to.

With that in mind, it is hard to obey God and to listen to God's voice, especially if God is telling us to step out of our comfort zones, to do things that we aren't used to doing. But both of our Scriptures remind us that stepping out of our comfort zone is the first step in following God's voice and living in faith. In order to grow and truly receive

the fullness of God's blessings, and allow those around us to receive those blessings, we have to move out of what we know.

In our Scripture today Abraham does just that. I know that at this point in Scripture it is Abram and Sarai but for the sake of familiarity and people knowing about whom I am talking I will call them Abraham and Sarah. Let's read about how they are asked to move out of our comfort zone and remind ourselves that God doesn't call us to be unsettled or move out of our comfort zone just for the sake of being uncomfortable, but rather so that we can be blessed and be a blessing to others.

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Imagine that you lived in your Lancaster County all of your life. Maybe you went away for college, and maybe a job or two took you away, but now you are back here. Your children are grown and you've worked hard. You just turned 75 and you're thinking that this would be a great time to retire and be able to build that back deck you've always wanted or to spend some good quality time with your spouse on the golf course, or just go fishing by yourself. Basically you're looking forward to the next 20 years being uneventful and relaxing and comfortable in a place that you know and that you love. You love where you are and you couldn't imagine being anywhere else.

One day as you're out sizing up a 4 foot putt, a voice tells you that tomorrow you are going to need to pack up your things, take your wife, leave Lancaster County and the home that your father had built for your family when you were growing up. God told you that you had to do all of this and move to Quarryville, no just kidding, move to the Sudan. For those of you who are used to receiving phone calls and having to move suddenly from one week to the next, it may sound like an adventure. But I think that for most of us it would be a very difficult move. I dare say that it might even be a time in your life that you allow yourself to question God, as in I must have heard wrong.

Well this is what happened to Abraham and Sarah. There they were living in the fertile crescent. One of the few places of civilization where there were actually some modern amenities that they were enjoying. They were 75 years old and getting older and were comfortable right where they were, surrounded by family, no kids but they had a great nephew in Lot who was like a son to them, they were living in the town where they had lived together for decades, and in the home that his father had built. There were a lot

of memories and ties to that place. Life could have been simple for them if they had stayed in the fertile crescent. Of course, we hear that their life would also have been static, basically a dead end because they had no children and their family would have died and ended there where they were. So they could have remained, happy the two of them but stagnant and immobile. It would have been easy for them to stay there.

But God had different plans for Abraham and Sarah. He didn't want them to end their lives and therefore the life of that family in complacency and comfort. God tells Abraham Go, **GO!** Go from your country, and your relatives, and your father's house to an undisclosed place that I'll tell you about later on. Trust me. If you move I will bless you, and, we often forget this part in this Scripture, I will bless those who are around you as well, but only if you move out of your comfort zone will I bless you and those around you. God promises to bless Abraham but only if he moves out of his comfort zone.

What God promises is well being, security, prosperity, prominence. These are all things that all people want. But, Abraham would not have known God as deeply as he did if he had stayed home. Because he moved out of his comfort zone he was able to know and love God as closely as anyone who has walked upon this earth.

Our Romans Scripture reflects that same concept and uses Abraham as an example of someone who was able to listen to God first, move, rely upon his faith, and then see what God could do. This, Romans tells us, is a sign of our faith. Abraham was, look at vs. 21, "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." No wavering, following God's call and eventually being blessed. This, Paul says, is what Jesus' resurrection and death are all about. Building a faith that allows us to step out of our comfort zone. Moving out of our comfort zone does not necessarily imply actual physical moving from one place to another.

There are many different ways in which to move out of our comfort zone so that God can bless you and that you can be a blessing to others. For some of you it just might be serving in the church leadership and seeing the intricate, sometimes unsettling behind the scenes workings of this church. For others it might mean a new job that makes you realize that you actually are able to use your gifts and skills for the kingdom of God and not just show up in order to produce income. For others of us it could be changing our understanding of the church and shift from an institutional church that we may be used to

which is intent on focusing upon our own needs, to a missional church whose primary focus is to look outside of our walls to see how we can be a blessing to people as God blesses us.

We may also find ourselves in a bit of a spiritual downturn where we feel somewhat disconnected from God, not sure where the Lord is leading us and where we ought to serve. You would be willing to step outside of your comfort zone if God's voice were clear to you in how you ought to step out. You know it would be easy for us here in Strasburg and continue in our regular good programs that we have set and move forward just as any other church would do.

But as a church we seem to have a history of being willing to step out of our comfort zone. Session this past week voted to consolidate the positions of organist/choirmaster and contemporary music director into one position that we are calling: Director of Music. It is a risky move to take when things are going well and as the saying goes, if it aint broke, don't fix it. But that isn't God's perspective. God's perspective is do everything that you can to reach as many people as you can which means never, ever being complacent with what you are currently doing.

We don't need to change our music structure, but we feel led that with this change we will be able to provide a better music program for the church and so reach out to more people. But it takes work, more work to do it this way, it takes more work figuring out once we hire that person what it will look like once they begin working. It would be so much easier just to do things the way that we do them. All of these things are risky, take a lot of work, coordination, and life would be so much easier if we just could come to church and go home.

But isn't the main goal of any church to bring people to Christ and to spread God's message of love to those around us? We don't need to do any of these things, just like Abraham didn't need to leave his home and step out of his comfort zone. But beware, if some people get the idea that we should do some innovative things: begin an afterschool program for elementary aged kids, look at our physical plant and see ways in which we can be more welcoming while at the same time be aware of what the cost of that will be, send a staff person to seminary which will leave us a bit in the lurch and

uncovered in some of our ministries, if we are going in that direction, then we are going to be treading on new ground and we are going to be way out of our comfort zone.

But ultimately this led Abraham to the promised land. I can assure you that the more we step out of our comfort zone and move in God's direction then the more God will bless us and challenge us and allow us to grow and the more we will be a blessing to other people.

This summer look for opportunities to respond as Abraham did to God's command to go and step out of your comfort zone and you will find that as individuals you will grow closer to God if you leave your "home" and as a church God will bless us with all of God's richest blessings. Amen.