



CHURCH of
the SAVIOUR

2537 Lee Road
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118-4136
Telephone: 216-321-8880
Website: www.COTSumc.org

“Go from Your Country”

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Genesis 12:1-4a (NRSV)

Rev. Amanda Moseng, Pastor of Discipleship

I have moved 9 times in my life, 8 of which have happened during my adult life. Given my commitment to itinerancy as an Elder in the United Methodist Church, I can expect that number to grow. I have lived in three states: Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. While all the moves were important, three were particularly significant. First, when we moved to Ohio. I had lived in Mishawaka, Indiana for essentially all of my life at that point and I had attended the same church for my whole life. I was just shy of 26 when we moved from Indiana to Ohio when my husband began his doctoral work at Miami University. It felt like my entire life had been uprooted. Different state, different city, different everything. I found connection at Oxford United Methodist Church, where I attended for four years, and during three of those years I served as the youth director. The second significant move was not that far geographically, moving from Oxford to Milford, Ohio for my first pastoral appointment. It was the same district, Ohio River Valley, but this move required my husband and I to live separately for half of the week since he was still finishing his doctoral work and my appointment was an hour away. This transition into pastoral ministry and having to split our time between two cities was a huge challenge for us. The third significant move was our move to Cleveland in the fall of 2019 when my husband started postdoctoral work at Case Western. We encountered significant issues with our initial apartment right off the bat, forcing us to live in an extended stay hotel for two weeks before we secured a different apartment. A huge storm blew in the night before our moving day, with downed trees and powerlines all throughout the Cleveland area. You might remember that storm. And finally, after we moved into our apartment, our car battery died. Those two weeks were downright terrible, but things started to smooth out fairly quickly. All moves are challenging in their own right, but these three took the cake. However, part of what makes these three moves stand out from the rest is because they were all in distinct response to God’s call. A call to higher education for both of us that would put us on the path God desired for us. A call to begin pastoral ministry. A call to the research experience my husband needed for his career path and for me, what would become the call to serve in a church I only tangentially knew about through Rev. Gregory Kendrick, Jr. There are times in life where God steps in and says, “Go.” If we are lucky, God gives us the details. But more often than not, we are called to go and step out in faith. “The Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’” Where is God calling us to go today?

Our scripture passage today focuses on Abram, the patriarch we more commonly know as Abraham. However, at this point in the story, all we know about Abram is that he is the son of Terah and that he has a wife named Sarai. They are from Ur of the Chaldeans. At some point Terah took his family and they left Ur and headed toward Canaan, but they settled in Haran (which is in present-day Turkey). Terah died while they were living in Haran. We are not to our main narrative, and we already see movement. Haran is not Abram’s home. It was temporary, as homes can be. God had another move in store for Abram.

The call of Abram began in this way: “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” These three verses are packed with meaning and significance. They are the key for the rest of Genesis and the Pentateuch (or Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible). They are a

fulcrum text, or a pivot point, deeply theological, and both link chapters 1-11 with the ancestral narratives while projecting forward to the later history of Israel. Abram will not see this future but his response shapes it.

A major theme running throughout Genesis is blessing, the loss of blessing, and God's redemptive work to restore relationship and blessing with humanity. We are only at chapter 12 in the book of Genesis and there is already much language around both blessing and curses, curses feeling rather predominant. Quite frankly, things were a hot mess. The ground had been cursed because of humanity, humanity had been cursed from the ground, God was ready to wipe everyone out because of the wickedness of humanity, and yet, there was always at least one faithful person. The promises and covenant that God made with Noah foreshadow the promises and covenant that God will make with Abram. The fivefold repetition of blessing in Abram's call effectively reverses the curses and punishments of the narratives preceding it. Henceforth, all of the families of the earth shall be blessed through Abram. Abram is the vehicle of blessing, but it is contingent on him obeying God's call to "go."

God calls Abram to go, so Abram went. We have no insight into his internal dialogue, or external dialogue, for that matter. We can assume that Abram went almost immediately, no hesitation. The faith that Abram demonstrated here is highlighted in Hebrews 11: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going." Paul references Abraham in his letter to the Romans, emphasizing Abraham's faith, reckoned to him as righteousness. We see his faith in this simple response, "So Abraham went, as the Lord had told him." He just went! He trusted in God's call even though he had no idea where God was leading him, even though the promise of those blessings probably seemed absurd at the time. He responded in faith initially, although as the narrative progresses he is rather duplicitous in some of his actions, which is problematic.

Abram's call to "go" invites us to consider God's call in our own lives and our response to that call. God provided none of the details about where Abram was going, just that God would show him as he went. He was being called to leave his country, his family, and his father's house. This was not a small request. He was being asked to leave the comfortable and the familiar for the uncomfortable and the unfamiliar. How do we respond when God asks us to go? Do we step out in faith, into the unknown? Or do we stay in place, unwilling to take the risk? How do we know it is from God? Faith feels risky at times, doesn't it? I could try to convince you of the merits of faith through scripture verses: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." "For we walk by faith and not by sight." Yes, and yes, these things are absolutely true. But you know what else is absolutely true? Following God's call on your life can be scary. It can be hard. It can be the last thing you want to do (anything but that, God!). There have been very few big things in my life that God has called me to that I immediately jumped into. I have wrestled with God. I have disagreed with God. I have asked if God was sure I was the right person. And you know what that makes me? Human. It makes you human, too. Faith is not easy and it requires much of us. But it also has the capacity to stretch us, help us grow, and deepen our relationship with God, to know more of God. Would God prefer that we take that step of faith immediately? Maybe? Probably? It would make for a less interesting story in the long run. I would have less sermon fodder if nothing else. I do not know where God is calling you, but I hope you know that it is okay if it takes you a little bit longer to take that step. Just be sure that you actually take it, because when all else fails, we know that God is faithful and true. That God's promises are sure. That God will never lead us somewhere where God's presence is missing. That God knows us better than we know ourselves. That God sees what we cannot yet see. That God is for us and works for our good. Trust in God's call and go. I promise it will be okay in the end. I have never regretted following God's call in my life, even when it required sacrifice and big changes. That does not mean it was a smooth process. Sometimes it was a painful process. And yet, God is faithful.

When we sense God calling us to go, we have to seek what that call is. This does not mean we seek a roadmap with all of the steps laid out, just what the first faithful step is. And then the next faithful step, one step at a time. We

ask God to reveal that step to us, to show us the way. We seek God's call and ask that God would bring us clarity. And then we listen. Do not rush the process. God will reveal to us what we need to know when we need to know it. It can help to talk with trusted friends and family members, people who will help you discern God's call. I am grateful for the pastors in my life, Pastor Dennis and Pastor Catherine, who helped me discern my call to ministry, one step at a time. I think I speak for both Rev. Call and me when I say it is a joy to help you discern your calling. It does not matter whether it is to ministry or not, as your pastors we are here to help you.

Where is God calling you to go? What if we think about it this way: where is God calling you to serve? How is God stirring your heart? What can you not get out of your mind? God has uniquely equipped all of us with spiritual gifts, talents, passions, and experiences that can be utilized to serve God and our neighbors. Where do your experiences, ministry passions and the needs of the community intersect? For me, my experience with death, grief, and loss intersects with the community by volunteering with the Hospice of the Western Reserve. There are so many different ways to serve within our community. What are your passions? Where is God calling you? And do not forget that there are a multitude of ways to serve here at Church of the Saviour. Kids and Youth Ministry. The A/V Production team. Greeters, ushers, welcome desk. Small group leader. Congregational care minister. TNT. This is just the smallest sampling of opportunities available here at COTS. And we need you. During the pandemic much of the work of ministry was clergy and staff led, which was reasonable and necessary, but the work of ministry is not just for me and Andy and our excellent staff. Frankly, it should not be. It is mainly the work of the people, all of you. I am here to equip and empower you, not do it all for you. This is your church. We need everyone working together as we seek to grow and thrive in this new season of ministry. We are happy to help you connect and find your way to engage in the life and ministry of COTS. Where is God calling you to serve?

God is calling us to go. When Jesus gave his disciples the great commission, he did not say, "If it fits within your schedule, why don't you consider going..." or "If you feel like it, you can go." No, what Jesus said was "Go therefore (*Go, therefore!*) and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Now, you may not actually be the one doing the baptizing but you are called to be someone who lives a life that reflects the love of God and helps someone else along their journey. So where is God calling you to go? Where is God calling you to serve? Our very lives are a witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel. You may never realize how your faithful steps in following God, your boldness in answering God's call to go, will positively impact someone else's faith walk. Inner discernment, seeking, and wrestling leads to an outward action that can change someone else's life, as well as your own. We are living from the inside out. Where is God calling you to go? Go in faith, taking your next faithful step. Thanks be to God. Amen.