

Genesis 15:1-6
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Luke 12:32-40

Abraham: Answering the Call

When I hear the stories of Abraham, I am amazed by how clearly God communicated with him. They may not have met for a cup of coffee. But God spoke to Abraham in exceptionally clear ways at several points in his life. Promises were offered, with a beautiful vision for the future, as in our Genesis lesson today. Abraham was promised he would receive a land, where he and his family would dwell. The elderly Abraham was promised a miracle of miracles – he and Sarah would together bear a long-awaited son, even in their old age. When times were rough? Abraham received encouragement to continue on the quest. When Abraham really messed up? God was gracious and the promises continued.

Some times God's promises called Abraham and his family to hurry up and wait. He and Sarah had to wait a long time to bear the son that God promised to them. At times, God's promises called Abraham and his household to move quickly or to change dramatically. When the time was right, they picked up everything and moved to a new place. They traveled and moved to a land and people that they did not know. We don't know how Sarah and Abraham felt, but I know that I experience a real mixture of feelings with dramatic transitions in life.

Christians Today: Answering the Call

Like Abraham, we also hear and know promises from the God of Israel. We may not hear a voice from God, as Abraham did so clearly. Yet we have a very

intimate relationship with God. At each of our baptisms, God poured God's very self upon us. Our lives were joined with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Joined with the one who died at the hands of human sin, and who was raised to eternal, unending life. In that moment, God promises to be with us through all the ups and downs of our lives. It stretches even beyond the vows that we humans take at marriage. God will be with us in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, in our lives now, through the death that will all experience, and into to the powerful life that conquers death. God will bless us in holy relationships, wherever two or three are gathered in Christ's name: in our meals together and in our prayers, in our humble and generous service for one another.

We may not be able to relate to a promise of land – or a miracle child. Yet God speaks to us all, through our joys and our sorrows. God calls to us through our longings and our relationships. At every big juncture in our lives, we seek to answer God's call. Many of us discern God calling us to marry and possibly to welcome children. We journey to find meaningful ways to grow and learn and to eventually be employed. We carefully choose the timing of retirement, and how to best spend our time. Our journeys also include experiences that we do not choose – unemployment, sickness, and losses like the death of loved ones.

At these points in our lives, it does not take long to discover that we are in an entirely different place. We have picked up and moved to someplace new. Our relationships change, even though it's still us – and our loved ones appear to be the same folks. There are unexpected challenges that we face in strange lands, which we encounter in the humdrum of daily life. We may not hear the call until we're already someplace new. Even then, the Spirit invites us to trust God's promises and live by faith in new ways.

Emanuel's: Answering the Call

Emanuel's also finds itself in a different land now. We may not have ventured out on an exciting, new adventure. We may not have moved across the city or across the country. Yet the world around us has changed. Church life does not receive the kind of honor and priority in our society that it once did. The people who live in our community have different priorities and hopes than before. People do not automatically attend church.

Emanuel's as a people has changed, too. We are a different collection of Christians, with a unique group of gifts and resources, and different priorities of our own. Perhaps we are busier. Maybe it's difficult for us to do as much as we used to. Like the other churches around us, we are finding that it is not enough for our church to continue the way we always have. Yes, we are having money problems, too. But money constraints do not limit faithfulness for the body of Christ. By the grace of God, faithfulness in Christ is not based on the same criteria as our society's economy is – it's not about how much money we receive or spend.

God speaks to us here and now, in words of love and vision. God promises that Christ is present with us, and working through our gathering and worship. With that promise, we are called to share God's love and grace with the world around us - - to teach and to baptize and to serve. That is not new to Emanuel's at all. At its best, I think Emanuel's serves as a space of worship and support, nourishment and rejuvenation, learning and growth with one another, in the name of Christ. Our building is a home for an AA meeting and a scout troop. The annual women's retreat, though it didn't happen this past spring, is a blessing in this same sort of

way. God draws us here, over and over again, to recharge – and then to be sent out to the world to love in the many ways that we do.

At this particular time, considering our congregation's financial situation and gifts, God calls us on an adventure. We're to live by faith as Abraham – to dwell in our promises, and to find ways of sharing our gifts in a new land. God calls us to see and hear our neighbors for who they are, and to invite them and welcome them in the name of Christ. The Spirit draws us to ministries that reach out more without wearing us out more than we are already. This may seem impossible. I have not lived as long as many of you have. Even so, I can't tell you the number of times that I misestimated how much I could handle before burn out appeared. We have limited time and energy – and one of Christ's amazing mysteries is that we can experience peace and joy and love that surpasses all understanding. When we live by faith, like Abraham, then we believe that all the most important things in our lives of faith are possible.

Emanuel's is a community of disciples, learning and serving and blessing in the name of Christ. There are endless possibilities, ways that we can join the pilgrimages of others as they seek God in their lives. This morning, Ellen told you about one new adventure that Emanuel's is beginning. Among our members, we have a handful of people at Emanuel's who are caring for older adults – for spouses or parents or grandparents. Caregiver Champions is a great opportunity for our members, and for everyone in the north boros. Hopefully we can invite others who need similar support, as they serve in what are challenging vocations. I pray that this is one of many steps in exploring how to journey alongside our community by faith. I know that many of you are praying regularly for our congregation. I hope

that you will add this to your prayers, that we may be further drawn out of the past, and blessed by joining the pilgrimages of our neighbors. Amen.