

If You Say So...  
Genesis 12:1-9  
The First United Presbyterian Church of Crafton Heights  
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I had lunch the other day at a local restaurant. It's a pretty nice place to be...I bet that you've been there. I like it. So as I was waiting to be seated, I noticed a group of people arriving. They didn't know each other, but they had all been invited by someone named Mark from a financial services company. The wait staff was obviously on the lookout for them and led them to a table that was pre-set. It turns out that their table was right next to mine.

They found their seats and made some small talk while they were waiting for him to arrive. When he got there, he welcomed them effusively. He had them fill out a registration card so that he could deduct this lunch from his income taxes, and then he gave them a Powerball Lottery ticket. Everyone but him placed an order for lunch, and then he launched into a spiel that was apparently some sort of a "get-rich-quick" scheme. I didn't hear the whole shebang, but it was pretty easy to fill in the blanks. "This is easy money. All you need to do is invest a little up front, and then I'll spell it out. I'll tell you what to do...You can't miss..." And then the food came. He left, giving the impression that he was too busy making money to eat, but they should be sure to enjoy the food and don't worry about the tip, because believe you me, these folks have been well taken care of... And for the rest of the hour, this group of former strangers continued to chat about themselves, but they were eyeing up those Lottery tickets and starting to think that maybe before too long they'd be eating in fancier places than this...

That was for me a fascinating contrast to the scripture I've been reading all week in preparation for this morning's worship. We are back in our study of Genesis, and today we get to the first real "turning point" in the narrative: the call of Abram and Sarai.

So far, we've had what the scholars call "pre-history". That is to say, it's an oral tradition, but it's tough to nail down who and where and when. We've seen the creation of the cosmos and of human beings. We've walked through the fall of mankind into sin and death. And we've seen how God promises a way through all of that. But today, we see Genesis enter a different kind of description and story-telling.

We have a name. Genesis 11 contains a long genealogy. The generations from Noah's son, Shem, to a man named Terah are listed. There are hundreds of years of faithful living, of people being fruitful and multiplying and scattering across the world...until we get to Terah, who has a son named Abram.

Genesis 11 gives us names: Terah and Abram and Sarai. And it gives us a place, saying that they left the city of Ur in the Chaldean territory and went into a region called Haran, and finally ended up in Canaan. And there, apparently, the line was coming to an end. Because there was a problem: Abram and his wife, Sarai, are childless. Genesis 11:30 tells us that "Sarai was barren. She had no child." "Barren". The opposite of "fruitful".

And in Genesis 12, we hear of God's intentions to create a great nation out of Abram and Sarai.

Maybe God should have stopped by the restaurant and seen Mr. Get-Rich-Quick in action. This was a guy who knows how to pick them. There they were, six well-scrubbed, well-futured, apparently healthy 20- and 30-somethings. They sure looked like a good bet to me: attractive,

energetic, optimistic...My hunch is that if one or two of them were to put the old nose to the grindstone, they could, to use their own words, “manufacture some wealth”.

Abram and Sarai? Not so much. As a childless couple of 75 and 65 respectively, they are not your prime candidates for nation-building. The odds just aren't that good. Note that God doesn't even say anything about a Powerball ticket.

And then we come to our reading for today. Take a look at your bibles. In verses 1-3, God says to Abram, “Go!” There's not a lot of detail. “Here's what I want you to do: Go. And here's what I'll do: I will show you...I will make of you...I will bless you...I will bless those who bless you...I will curse those who curse you...” Five times, we hear what God will do.

Hmmmm. Maybe this call is more dependent on God than it is on Abram.

So what does Abram do? He goes. Amazingly enough, he says, “If you say so, I'll go.” And look at the verbs that are connected with Abram's name in verses 4-9: Abram went...Abram took...Abram set forth...Abram passed through...Abram built an altar to worship...Abram pitched his tent...Abram journeyed on... “If you say so, I'll do it. I'll go.”

Centuries later, the early Christian community that is revealed in the Letter to the Hebrews holds up this scene from Abram and Sarai's lives as an example of faithful living. These two old codgers believe in a promise that is risky at best. It is a promise that they already know *will not come true in their lifetimes!* God says, “Sooner or later, I'm going to give this land to your descendants. To your children and to their children.” Abram and Sarai were stewards of this promise – believing it and living faithfully in it until the next generation came along.

These early Christians saw a lot of themselves in Abram and Sarai. They were followers who were depending on God to keep the promise. They called their faith in Jesus of Nazareth “the Way”. I think that they meant that to indicate the fact that they were trying to follow in his steps. “The Way” meant the way of the Star...the Way of Bethlehem...The Way of the Cross...the Way of the Resurrection...

Like Abram and Sarai, these first Christians saw that the world was not what it was supposed to be. They had heard the imperatives that Jesus had laid down about caring for the widow and the orphan; about seeking the lost and loving the loveless...they believed in a Kingdom that was both here and still on the way, and they saw themselves on a journey during which they expected God to reveal some ways in which they could participate more fully in a Kingdom lifestyle. And so they did not rest in their own culture, but instead they looked to Jesus to show them a better way.

Abram and Sarai and the early Christians said, in effect, “we will wander through this world as we seek to follow the Promise...but we don't think that this world can define us...we're not sure that this world makes a lot of sense to us right now...We will travel, we will pitch our tents, we will serve...if you say so, Lord.”

Have you looked around our world lately? We live in a world that says that we are responsible only to ourselves. How about that television commercial where the parents are dutifully saving for their daughter's college fund. Any time they get a nickel, they look at each other and say, “College Fund”. Then, when she gets a scholarship, the next scene shows a yacht setting sail – a yacht that is named “College Fund”. What's the implication? Hey, get it while you can. Spend it while you've got it. Take care of what you need to but then...all bets are off. It's all about *you!*

But here's the thing...nothing has fundamentally changed. The people of God are people who still follow a promise. The question for this morning is where and how will you pitch YOUR tent? Will

you, as a follower of the Way, as a member of the Body of Christ, as one who wears the name “Christian”, will you live differently than the world that is around you? Can you remember and structure your life around the notion that you cannot define your worth by your money or your child or your boyfriend or the size of your home?

The promise is still there: “In you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.” The world needs you. It might not know it now, any more than the Canaanites appreciated Abram or the Romans appreciated the first disciples. But the world is looking for a promise. Will you journey into that world and seek to be the Kingdom of God for your neighbor? There’s nothing “get rich quick” about this, and we may find ourselves doing a number of things that shape reality for those who will live after we’ve died. I don’t think that that matters. Praise God that it didn’t matter to Abram and Sarai. Let’s trust, and let’s go. Amen.