

**A Sermon preached at St. Andrew's Church, Soham, on the second Sunday of Lent 201,  
March 12th. [ Genesis 12:1-4] by Rev'd Canon Mike Booker**

**God calls Abraham**

There's a back story to the first reading we heard this morning, from the Book of Genesis - a story of sadness, and probably also dissatisfaction. Abram was part of a family that had left Ur of the Chaldees - a great, ancient city, south of modern Baghdad - and moved to a new home. They were leaving behind bereavement - Abram's brother, Haran, had died and it seems the family were seeking a new start. Haran's brother, father and son, together with their wives, head off to seek a new land. They knew where they were going, at the start at least - to the land of Canaan.

There may have been another motive too. These were people, this was an age, when nothing 'just happened' to their thinking. Ur was a centre of the worship of the moon god, and just possibly there was the search not only for a new home, and new start, but for a new god.

Somewhere along the line the journey halted, interrupted for reasons we don't know, and the family settled, on the fringes of what we now call Turkey, making its home in a town with an interesting name - Haran - the very name of their lost family member, whose death may have started all the journey. Maybe, of course, by the time this story was written down, the town was known by the name given to it by Abram, his father and nephew. We don't know, but it seems the family, at the point in the story just before our first reading, had stopped travelling and started settling. A journey that had begun with a goal in mind ended, temporarily at least, in a new town, a new family base, a place where just maybe they could stop and forget the past, build a new future - a place where things might start to go right once again.

But the Bible is not only the story of human life and human aspirations. It is so far more than that. A record of the actions of the Living God, and of the responses of people to God's actions, God's plans. God's call.

And so we come to the beginning of Genesis 12, which we heard as our first lesson, one of the great turning points of the Bible. The chapters before have been the story of a perfect creation, spoiled by human greed and evil, and now God acts in a new way. God calls. God calls for a purpose, and God makes a remarkable promise to one man from this family of nomads.

*v1 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.*

Just as things may have been settling, God unsettles Abram once again. Just as a new city had maybe begun to feel like home, God calls Abram to leave it. But maybe something's also familiar, something falls into place once again in Abram's mind - a memory of the first sense of a longer journey, a land further from the ancestral home. He needed the courage, the motivation, to take that next step, and God provides it:

*vv2-3 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. 3 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."*

"If you will go" God is saying, in effect, "I will be doing something in and through your family that you could never have begun to dream or to imagine" - and what God will do is something of a great privilege and an awesome responsibility. The privilege of being the father of a great nation - and the responsibility of being a source of blessing to every other nation on earth.

From this pivotal point in the whole of the story of the Bible, the whole of the story of the human race, God's plans go on. Abram becomes the ancestor of the people of Israel, and through them, in time, all the nations of the earth are blessed as Abram's descendent, Jesus Christ, in born, teaches, dies, defeats death and in Him the people of each and every nation have the privilege to join God's people, to be those to whom the promise made to Abram applies.

A powerful story

A far-off story

A story that can see an awful long way from our own lives, from Soham in 2017.

But we shouldn't be put off. Yes, some parts of the Bible are challenging and puzzling, but often the Bible can speak in a very clear and immediate way to us today if we remember two very simple but vital truths:

- God is still God
- People are still people

So....what can we apply to our own lives as we think together about the inspiring but very ancient story of God's call to Abram?

1. It's right to be dissatisfied. If we watch the news on TV, or simply observe the world around us in our own street, our own workplace, our own family, and feel fed up, feel it shouldn't really be like this, we're in good company. That was the start for Abram. This world is not as it should be - it has been spoiled, and goes on being spoiled, because all too often it - or at least the people in it - have lost touch with God and with the way God longs for things to be. If you're a bit fed up, don't worry too much - you're in good company.

2. But secondly, being fed up is never an end in itself. It has value only if we are longing for something better. And here's the good news. The same, unchanging God who called Abram has a message for each of us too, from the lips of His Son, Jesus - "follow me". And so life has a sense of direction our frustration leads us on to purpose, if we are ready respond to that call. For each and every one of us the journey may not be a physical one - in terms of simple geography it's very likely God's call to most of us is to stay exactly where we are - but it is a journey all the same, being ready to leave our town plans and priorities behind. Sometimes in that we find ourselves discovering that actually, the way to rediscover the plans we'd always truly wanted deep down in side is to put God first and see what He wants of us. Whoever we are, God is calling, calling on a journey to follow, calling us to be ready to leave things behind, calling us to trust.

3. Third, going God's way is the way of blessing. That can never be a glib or simple answer, because it's simply not true that life for those who are determined to follow the call of Jesus have an easier life than those who don't. The important thing is not what we have but who we are with. We were always designed to be people who live in the presence of God, and, as St Augustine put it, our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Him. But if God is calling, and promising blessing, then it's only wise to go the way that blessing is to be found.

4. And finally, if we hear God's call, if we follow in the footsteps of Abram, of every single one of God's people who has walked God's way through the centuries, then we join in with God's great plan - God's desire that, in those who are His and walk His way - all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Our world will be a better place if God's people follow God's ways, and call other to walk with them and to discover God's blessing for themselves.

Soham will be blessed if God's people follow God's ways, and call other to walk with them and to discover God's blessing for themselves.

Our families and our friends will be blessed too if God's people follow God's ways, and call other to walk with them and to discover God's blessing for themselves.

God is still God  
People are still people

God called - and Abram followed, and in and through that, in spite of all the dead ends, re-starts and other disasters the way - Abram found God's blessing and in him and his descendants God's blessing was opened up to the whole world.

That's the call to us too today. That's the privilege, that's the honour, that's the challenge God holds out. Whether we are unsettled, dissatisfied and just wondering, or whether we know God is calling us and it's time to step out, or whether we have been following for years but got a bit footsore and tired, let's listen afresh, take a deep breath, pray for courage, and step out - as God leads us into His future. A future of blessing, of life in His presence, and a future in which God has great plans for us to be a blessing to all those around.