

Genesis 12:1-9
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Acts 9:10-19a
Matthew 4:18-22

Sermon January 5th, 2020

Leaps of Faith Sermon Series: *God Invites Us to Follow*

In our readings this morning, we hear three stories where God comes into people's lives. Inviting them to follow. Inviting them to become active participants in God's ministry for the world. In Genesis, God comes to Abram and asks him to give up everything he owns and knows to follow God to an unknown place. Abram has built up a good life for himself and his family. Abram has spent his entire life on the homestead. Abram is living comfortably. God asking Abram to give this all up is asking him to take a pretty big leap of faith.

Well, God goes on to make a promise to Abram that God will bless Abram in this new place. Or in other words, God will take care of Abram and his family. Yet, one would think Abram would still doubt or at least ask why, with all he would be leaving behind? No! Instead, Abram decides pretty quickly to follow God into the unknown. How often has God invited you to follow God into the unknown? Did you respond like Abram? If not, what held you back?

In the book of Acts, Ananias, a faithful follower of Jesus's teachings is challenged in his faith when God asks him to risk his life to heal someone who is out to arrest him. Saul has come to Damascus to hunt down the Christians. Ananias would rather hide or run for the hills than reveal himself to Saul. However, God invites Ananias to trust God that God will look after him if he approaches Saul. And to believe God when God says God has done something to Saul to change him into someone new. Someone who would accept Ananias' grace. Ananias chooses to trust in God and heal Saul. What we see out of Ananias' leap of faith is that Ananias becomes an instrument of God's gracious love for Saul. Saul changes his name to Paul and goes on to be a major leader in the church. How often has God asked you to sacrifice something, so to, reflect God's grace to someone else? Did you respond like Ananias? If not, what held you back?

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus a carpenter's son from Galilee walks by some people who are fishing for a living. Jesus invites them to come and follow him. There is no introduction that we hear or previous witness that suggests a reason for these people to give up their careers and follow Jesus. Yet, when Jesus asks Peter and Andrew and later James and John to leave their careers behind, and follow him. They do.

Immediately. How often has Christ invited you to leave what you are doing and follow him? Did you respond like Peter? If not, what held you back?

We hear these stories. We see how God takes care of Abram and his family. We see how God uses Ananias' gracious act of healing to encourage Paul to minister to the Gentiles. As we read on in the gospels and the rest of the New Testament we see how God works in and through the disciples to reflect God's love in the world. As we look at our own faith journey we see how God works in and through us to reflect God's love in our lives. We are inspired by these stories to follow Jesus into the unknown.

However, we also hear that their leaps of faith came with it's challenges. Abram faces many hiccups along the way as he and his family journey to this new unknown place. It wasn't easy by any means. At one-point Abram has to choose between his two sons Ishmael and Isaac. Leaving one in the desert hoping that God will take care of him too. We see that Ananias and later Paul face many hardships from persecution for following Jesus' teachings. As we read further along in our gospels and the rest of the New Testament we hear that the disciples stumble and fall many times as they try to learn from Jesus how to be a disciple. In our own lives we see that we face sacrifice, persecution, and doubt as we try to follow Jesus.

Now despite these challenges we face, through our faith in Jesus Christ, we believe that God will take care of us if we get up and follow. Even if giving up things isn't always easy. For the disciples. For Abram. They were asked to give up their careers. Their possessions. For Ananias he was asked to risk his life so someone else could experience life.

For each one of us we try hard to figure out what God is asking us to give up to follow him. Whether it is asking us to give up some of our possessions or treats to help support God's ministry. Or asking us to give up some time with friends and family to volunteer for a ministry in the church. Or give up something we like doing so we can dedicate time and energy to worship, reflect on scripture, and pray.

Sometimes when we hear these stories we can get scared as we think God is expecting us to give up everything. When instead, I feel God is wanting us to put God and God's vision for the world first in our lives. Whatever that looks like. Or in other words, to live a generous life reflecting God's grace in the world. Being willing to sacrifice a little for the sake of the gospel.

Because having faith and being a generous person go hand and hand for Jesus. It takes amazing trust to know that if we part with some of our wealth. If we miss a social to do something God has called us to do. If we sacrifice a little to make time for God's work. That everything is going to be okay. That God is going to look out for us.

When we can trust in God's promises. When we leave our nets behind and follow Jesus we see the amazing things God does in our lives to reflect God's love for the world. For example, finding out that the extra money we gave last month helped make someone's Christmas a little merrier even though we were missing our daily Starbucks Coffee. Or deciding to miss a social event you were really looking forward to, to be with a friend while they are dealing with a difficult event. Seeing how your comfort and support lifts them up. Or giving up your Saturday evenings to volunteer your time for a ministry that helps clothe and feed those living in poverty or a ministry that helps people heal from their addictions or a ministry that helps young people grow in faith.

When we open ourselves up to God's promises we are inspired to live a generous life. Giving with cheerful hearts. Taking leaps of faith. So, others too can experience God's healing gracious love. We see what God's love can do for people. We see what God's love can do for our hurting world. We have seen what God's love has done for us.

Yes, the road won't always be easy. We will wrestle with some of the sacrifices, but what comes out of these sacrifices will change people's lives. Will change us.

Let us pray, gracious God, give us what we need to trust in you. To take a leap of faith into a life of discipleship where we live with generous hearts. Changing lives with your grace and love. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**

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