Are We There Yet?
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
September 14, 2014

Genesis 12:1-9

Well, we’ve arrived! I’m not quite sure where we arrived, but Abram is out there building another altar, so he must think that it’s a good place.

Not to imply that we’ll be staying here... there’s no guarantee of that. This is the second altar he’s built since we left Haran. I thought the first one meant that we were putting down new roots, but I was wrong. It was a lovely place... Shechem, they called it. There was a big tree there with wonderful shade and a babbling brook to quench our thirst. Yes, it was a very pleasant spot. I could have lived there quite happily.

But, just as I’d started to get used to it, he finished that altar, made his sacrifices and announced that we were on the move again. Pack up the tent, he said. Gather the sheep, he said. Let’s move along, he said.

As you might imagine, I wasn’t too happy about that, but he was determined that this wasn’t where we were supposed to settle and that the Lord had greater plans for us all.

I wonder how he can be so sure that the voice he hears is God?

What is frustrating to me is that it seems like every place we stop is already occupied! Most of the people we encounter are kind, they offer us hospitality, but you know what my mother used to say about guests and fish... both will stink to high heaven after a few days!

We don’t know these people. They speak a different language than we do, they pray to different Gods. So we move on.

And now we are here among the hills. Apparently we’re not far from a place called Bethel – and Abram is building again.

I wonder if he will ever be satisfied that he’s found the place where we are meant to live? That’s the problem with these visionary people – you never quite know where they’ll be leading you next. And my husband is certainly a
man with a vision. He is so sure that he is being driven on by the Lord, not just to find a new place to live, but to start a whole new nation.

I mean, how ambitious can you get?

Sometimes, in the evening, we sit around the fire and he talks about his hopes and dreams and I can almost believe him. He says the Lord has made him so many promises – about his children inheriting this new land and about his own name being remembered as that of a great man.

Yes, he’s quite sure of himself. But I have to wonder... how is all of this going to happen? He’s seventy five and I’m sixty five and there has never been any sign of a child. Although he tells me that I’m still beautiful, the one thing he can’t reassure me about is my age. We’re not getting any younger.

But I’m getting ahead of myself, and that’s only a small piece of our story. This new land is the other. I’m not sure exactly where it is, and I don’t know how far we have to go before we finally put down roots. I sure would like to put down some roots.

But it’s something of a family tradition, this moving on. Abram’s father Terah was the one who started it. Now he was a character! He had three sons and one of them died before he did. That was Haran – I think the place we used to live was named after him, though I’m not quite sure.

Anyway, when Haran died he left a son called Lot and Lot became a part of Terah’s own family. His other sons, my Abram and his younger brother Nahor, both married and we all lived together in one big group, with my father-in-law Terah looming large and in charge.

I’ll never forget the day he called the men together and told them that he was moving us all from Ur, where we lived. We were all young then and it was an exciting adventure, packing our belongings and moving with a great caravan of people all looking for a new place. We settled in Haran and lived there happily for many years until Terah died at the ripe old age of two hundred and five!

Imagine my shock when I found out that Abram wanted us to follow his father’s example and start to travel all over again. I’m not as young as I used to be and I was happy enough in Haran. But once the idea was fixed in
Abram’s mind, there wasn’t much point in trying to change it, so I started to think positively about it and work out what might be good about moving on.

A change may shake me up a bit. I had become a little set in my ways and this new challenge has certainly made me rethink what might be in store.

But still, I wonder… will I stand up to the journey? What will the new place be like? Will God fulfil those promises made to my husband? If so, who will be the one who has the child that will found this new nation? Could it possibly be me?

Can God really perform a miracle like that? Maybe … Who knows?

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When you think about it, we hold a few things in common with Sarai and her husband Abram. True, they lived 3,800 years ago in a part of the world that is quite foreign to us, but some similarities are there.

Like them, one moment we’re in a particular place that is known to us, we are comfortable or at least acclimated. The next moment something happens that pulls us out of that place. Ready or not we have been yanked out of our comfort zone, and a big adventure of the unknown is about to begin.

Some of the transitions we go through in life are expected; some come as a total shock. Some are exciting and joyful, even if also challenging; and others are scary and horrific. If there’s anything that all of these different transitions hold in common with one another, it’s the idea of dislocation.

Our scripture lesson this morning features a couple for whom this dislocation was quite real. In a time when many of us would be making the decision to retire, Abram and Sarai are called by God to leave their home and make a new home in a place far away.

Of course we can argue that in our day older adults do that all the time: they sell the family house and move to Florida; they move to a distant state to be closer to children; they go into assisted living facilities.

But Abram and Sarai didn’t just leave for something familiar. They pick up stakes in Babylon—which is today Iraq-- and move to Canaan--which is today Israel—with a stop in Egypt. It was a journey of almost a thousand miles, to an entirely different culture than the one they knew.
In the latter half of their lives, when most of us would be looking forward to doing fun things or relaxing things, Abram and Sarai are asked to make the most difficult transition of their life.

Imagine what it would be like to leave the only community you’ve ever known. Now imagine that you can’t go online to look at photos of the place, can’t phone ahead to the faces that will greet you at the other end. Imagine the physical exertion involved to move a household a thousand miles—on camel and donkey—back—when you’re no longer physically robust.

It’s something of a miracle that upon hearing a call to transition out of one life and into another, Abram actually went. The rest of the story of the people of God hangs on that very decision.

Sometimes in our life we get an offer, an invitation, a hunch, an inkling that will usher us out of one place and into another, and we need to decide whether to go, whether to accept it and enter into a time of change.

And other times we have absolutely no choice in the matter. The move, the illness, the breakup is foisted on us and the only thing we can decide is how we will handle the transition. And maybe in every decision to change the biggest hurdle to overcome is within, it is to take that first step into the unknown.

Remember that God didn’t wait for Abram and Sarai to get to the Promised Land. Instead, God was with them every step of the journey. God was in the holy sense of something that led them out of their comfort zone into a much bigger, braver world. So if you are someone who considers yourself to be in the middle of a transition, I want you to know that you are in very good company. May God bless your every step, too. Amen.