

Leaving Home
Genesis 12: 1-4a
John 3: 1-17

I read somewhere that the African impala can jump to a height of over ten feet and cover a distance of over thirty in one bound. Yet these powerful, magnificent animals can be kept in a zoo, contained in an enclosure with only a three-foot-high wall.

The impalas will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall.

The call of Abraham in Genesis 12, which Cole read, is a pivotal theological moment in our Scripture. *Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land I will show you...I will bless you.” ...So Abram went, as the Lord had told him...*

The call of Abraham, as the apostle Paul reminds us, represents true righteousness, listening directly to the call of God before there was any written law that told us about righteousness. The call of Abraham represents trust in God and belief that God will make good on his promises. The call of Abraham represents faithful obedience to the will of God. And the call of Abraham represents risk-taking, leaving home, leaving behind country, kindred and father’s house to go who knows where - to jump where you cannot see where your feet will fall.

The days of Lent beckon us to embark on spiritual journeys, to step ahead not knowing exactly where our feet will fall. Lent invites us to leave behind familiar ways of being and sojourn for a while in a kind of desert, to

search there for new spiritual insights. Maybe you will read the Bible again – as if for the first time. Or meet Jesus again – for the first time. Maybe you will try that Bible study for six weeks or sing in the choir for the Palm Sunday cantata. Whatever it might be in particular, your steps away from the safe, familiar, comfortable and easy represent a spiritual discipline. You are following Abraham in faithful obedience, trust and listening to God. Just for six weeks...or maybe you will discover a blessing for a lifetime.

The days of Lent beckon us also to pay attention to where we are. Perhaps life has presented you with a pivotal moment in your spiritual journey, whether or not you sought it or decided upon it. After all, God came to Abram, not the other way around.

But Abram listened, Abram paid attention, Abram went where God told him to go. Lent invites you to listen to your life, to pay attention to God speaking to you, now. What is happening? What is unsettling? What is suddenly different – in your body, in your attitude, in your surroundings, in your relationships? Are you at risk, leaving behind the familiar and homelike, taking one step after another, not knowing where your feet will fall?

The gospel reading from John introduces us to a man like this, a man at risk. His name is Nicodemus. Nick is a well established Pharisee and by dint of that a person certain in his faith and in his teaching of it. And yet, he's been listening to Jesus and his familiar way has been jostled. He is unsure of things now. He has lots of questions. He risks coming to Jesus at night, when reality is distorted, when dreams take place. *“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”*

Jesus upends Nick's system even further. *"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."* What a strange thing to say! It doesn't make much sense to Nick. Being in conversation with Jesus is certainly confusing!

Jesus tells Nicodemus not to be astonished at that what he is saying, but on top of being lost, that is exactly what Nicodemus is: *"How can these things be?"* Jesus has a sharp, accusing reply: *"Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"* That must have set Nicodemus back on his heels!

In some ways Nicodemus is like Abraham, called to step out not knowing where his feet will fall...called by God to leave his spiritual home, his household of faith - the temple and the other Pharisees – in order to trust the promise of God in Christ Jesus, the promise of salvation and eternal life.

Unlike Abraham, we don't know what became of Nicodemus, whether he followed Jesus or not. But still, Jesus gave him, and us, that promise: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

That, my friends, is the promise to hold onto as you journey through the days of Lent. Trust in God to lead you through and out. Trust in God that there will be solid ground beneath your feet even if you cannot see it. You will arrive at a new place of blessing. Through Christ, salvation will be yours.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French philosopher, paleontologist and Jesuit priest, wrote this poem for the time of Lent:

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are, quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way
to something unknown,
something new.
Yet it is the law of all progress that it is made
by passing through some stages of instability
and that may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you.
Your ideas mature gradually. Let them grow.
Let them shape themselves without undue haste.
Do not try to force them on
as though you could be today what time
-- that is to say, grace --
and circumstances
acting on your own good will
will make you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new Spirit
gradually forming within you will be.

Give our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.
Above all, trust in the slow work of God...

God is able to work miracles in us when we leave home, even if we
walk not being able to see where our feet will fall.

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