



# The Trinity Pulpit



## Where He Leads I'll Go

### Genesis 12:1-3

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Most all scholars and church leaders agree that the church is in transition. We are not sure what it will finally look like when it emerges from this time of transition, but to be sure the church is not what it once was, and to face the challenges of the future it cannot remain what it is now. Now don't hear me wrong this morning. I am not speaking of being unorthodox in regards to our doctrines. I am not speaking of a church that lets go of the doctrines of faith that are based on the truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture. But while we continue to confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God created all things and that the Bible is true and reveals to us the way to God, Jesus Christ, and the way to live out our faith, we must come to grips that the world in which we now live is not the world of our grandparents, parents or, for that matter, not even the world of our own short history.

If the church is in transition, then what are we to do? What are we to do as Christians who love the church and in particular who love *this* church? What is our response to such moments? We can ignore the change around us. That is always a good possibility. It is the easiest way. We can continue to live as we want in what we believe are comfortable surroundings, and chances are that most of us will outlive any real crisis in the church's existence. Because these types of transitions take centuries, we could live out our lives continuing to do the same things and function in the same way and leave the transitioning to the next generation. That is the safest and, I must say, the most self-centered approach.

We could choose to acknowledge the shifts and changes of culture but then refuse to do

anything about it. We could instead choose to surround ourselves with people who think like we do, dress like we do, worship like we do, and who have the same views on aspects of life like we do and believe that we can live with some sort of fortress mentality. When we join together with like minds, we are a strong force and we can get much done and we can almost become convinced that things have really not changed at all. Those who say things are changing in culture are just intellectual "egg heads" who have nothing better or productive to do. The truth is, we have tried that approach in church life and we call it denominationalism. Although I am very supportive of all of our denominational relationships, everyone I know including denominational leaders will tell you that denominations as we have known them in the past are in transition themselves.

There is another choice. It is to embrace this transition with faith and convictions. All those things are important if the church is going to fulfill its God given mission. We are told that the mission of the church is to join God in reconciling the world to Christ. We are called to be ambassadors of Christ. We are called to live out the priorities of the kingdom of God which Jesus tells us are to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom to the prisoner and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim that this is the year of the Lord's favor. In this moment of transition in our world we are called to live out our own calling from God and to live out as a church the calling God has for Trinity Baptist Church. What will it take for this to occur?

It will take faith. Faith is being sure of what you hope for and certain of things we do

not see. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that what all of the ancients were commended for was their faith. Jesus asked the question, “When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith?” We like to talk about faith, but truly having faith is another thing. Faith, in my opinion, requires three things. It requires with courage letting go of the familiar, being comfortable with mystery and believing in God’s goodness.

Is that not what we find in Abram’s call in Genesis 12? Abram and his family had settled in Haran. It was there he had buried his father and made his home. Then God comes to Abram and says, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.” This call was to leave everything that is familiar. It is a call to leave one’s identity, financial security, sure future and support system. To say this is a big step for Abram is an understatement. It is a life changing moment. It is one of the decisions that will determine the rest of his life. It is one of those life decisions like taking a new job, saying “I do” at the altar or having a child. These are decisions which should require some thought and prayer. The call is to leave that which is familiar and venture out with God. The first step of faith is to be willing to let go of that which is certain for that which we believe to be certain.

Abram is also called to become comfortable with mystery. God says not only leave all your security, but “go to a land I will show you.” It is a trip with an uncertain destination. It is a journey without knowing exactly where you are going. Most of us don’t take a trip without some directions. Now I know that many wives believe that most men just get in the car and go, but most of the time we have some idea where we are going. Of course now we have our GPS to tell us if we are still on course. The GPS systems which we have in our cars or use in conjunction with our cell phones can locate us at any time. It is hard to get lost these days, but some of us are better at it than others. Yet, the idea of not having precise directions and knowing exactly where we are going before we begin has become almost a given in our technologically driven culture. We leave very little place for mystery in life. We want to know all the

answers and, for that matter, all the questions before we embark on anything new. Yet, to be a person of faith there must be mystery. Last week Paul reminded us we see through a glass darkly but one day face to face. I am convinced more and more as I grow as a Christian that part of the maturing process as a Christian is that you end up with more questions than answers, and that is okay.

*Mystery really is the gift of God to our constant desire to control and manage life. Mystery and meaning are not opposites. Rather, a mystery is something that has more meaning than we can comprehend.<sup>1</sup>*

One of our favorite old hymns says:

*I know not why God’s wondrous grace to me he hath made known, nor why unworthy Christ in love redeemed me for his own. I know not how this saving grace to me he did impart, nor how believing in his Word wrought peace within my heart. I know not how the Spirit move, convincing men of sin, revealing Jesus through the Word creating faith in Him. I know not when my Lord may come, At night or noon day fair. Nor if I’ll walk the vale with him or meet him in the air.*

Then the chorus resounds:

*But I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

We become comfortable with mystery because we have placed our faith not in the circumstances of life but in the personhood of Christ, and that makes all the difference as we seek to discover God’s mission for our lives.

This leads us to the last point concerning having faith. To be a person of faith we must trust the goodness of God. Abram did not know where he was going, but he had the promise of God’s blessing. Abram believed in the end that God was good and that would be enough for him to leave everything behind and journey with God. It is that Abram is convinced that God is good that makes him leave it all behind and journey in mystery. There really is no other reason. He does not know where he is going, only where he has been.



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He does not know how God will bless him, only that he will. He does not know fully the big picture, but he knows enough of his past with God and God's faithfulness today to start the journey.

If the church is going to fulfill its God given mission, it must begin with faith. It must begin by being willing to venture from that which is familiar and comfortable. If you and I as individual Christians are going to discover our mission, we must be willing to step toward God's call even if it means sometimes we are uncomfortable. What does that mean for you? What is God calling you to do that is beyond your comfort level? It might be teaching a class. You have been afraid in the past to speak, but you know that God is leading in this direction. It might be to be more involved in the life of the church. You have always been someone on the periphery of church life. You come to worship and enjoy it and benefit from it, but beyond this hour you have not been involved. It might be to give your time to one of our many helping ministries. It will require a change in routine, schedule and action, but it could come with great blessing.

Maybe it means to be faithful without all the answers in hand. You are not sure about your job or your life's direction, but today you will be faithful in the mystery of this journey with God. You will simply do what God requires today and be at peace with the mystery of the destination.

For some of us it will be to trust God's goodness. No matter what fear we have of tomorrow and the uncertainty of today, we will choose to trust God's goodness and that will be enough.

Yet, beyond faith there must also be conviction. As I stated, what we are speaking of today is not change for change sake. We are not speaking of transitioning as Christians and the church for the sake of change. We are speaking of sharing the gospel with a changing culture. It will take not only faith but conviction. We can have convictions regarding many things. We can be convinced of a political point of view or a cultural norm. But if we are going to discover our God given mission, then we must reclaim the convictions of the kingdom of God. Abram left everything by faith. He

left what was comfortable, he embraced mystery and he trusted God's goodness, but he also had a conviction that God's mission for his life was far more important than anything else in his life. If we are going to discover and live God's mission for our lives, and if the church as a whole is going to live out our mission, then we must become convinced that the convictions of the kingdom of God must become priorities to us.

Where do we find these convictions? Well, Jesus shows us the way. When he burst onto the scene, he came to his own synagogue community and took the scrolls and read from the prophet Isaiah these words:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This was essentially Jesus' mission statement. This was the purpose of his coming and the kingdom's priorities. What does this say to us? It is a reminder of what is important to God and what our mission will look like.

Jesus said he was called by God to preach good news to the poor. We are called to preach good news. The word *preach* is really *evangelize*. The idea here is that we are called foremost to share the good news about Jesus Christ. For many of us this creates an image that makes us uncomfortable. We think of hell fire preachers or evangelists who scare people into the kingdom. Although they definitely have their place, they are not what many of us are comfortable with. If that is what we mean by evangelize, then we would reject it. But that is not really the picture. To preach the good news is to bring the hope to others that only Jesus can bring to their lives. It is to tell of the good news that even though we have sinned, God has forgiven us. It is to remind those around us that God's love is not negated by our own rebellion and poor choices. Let me remind us this morning that all of the programs of our church are important. We enjoy fellowship, we grow in our discipleship, we like the programs our church has to



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offer, but if we forget that the purpose for all we do is to bring others into the kingdom of God with the good news of Christ, then we have ceased to be the church. We have sadly missed the mission God has for us. Our primary mission is preaching the good news.

We are called to proclaim freedom to the prisoner and to release the oppressed. Most scholars believe this to be metaphorical. We have good news for those who are imprisoned by life and life's consequences. We have the good news of grace. The Law of Moses had become a prison which became an oppressive way to live. Jesus came to speak of grace and not the law. He came to remind the people that the law itself was about grace and not oppression. We have come to remind people that God's grace is greater than all their sin. We have come to remind them that there is not a situation, circumstance, consequence or location they can be where God's love cannot reach them. There is nothing that can separate them from the freeing love of God.

Most of all, I want us to be reminded today that the good news we preach is not to somehow bound people's lives but to free them. We are about releasing people to be all God has for them to be. We are not here to tell people what they can't do or be, but to release them into God's grace which brings the great possibilities of life, freedom and meaning.

We are here to bring sight to the blind. We are here to tell others who are searching for meaning in this life what is real and what is not. We are here to keep those we love from groping in the

darkness all the days of their lives. We have the light of the world that will shine upon them and help them as they find their way through life.

Most of all, we are to proclaim that this kingdom is at hand. It is right now. It is not for a life to come, it is being lived out right now in this life. Jesus told those to whom he read that day that this scripture had been fulfilled in their hearing. In other words, the Lord's favor had come. The kingdom of God and the favor of God in people's lives have come right now. We do not have to wait to experience the power of God, the presence of God, the work of God or the love of God. If we will commit ourselves to Christ, we can know the favor of God right now.

That is our mission. To have faith to follow God and to have the convictions of the kingdom become the priorities of our lives.

It's time for us to discover and live out our God given mission. It will require faith and conviction. Like Abram it will require a picking up and walking with God on a journey that will last a life time. It is a missional journey of faithfulness. But thanks be to God we do not go alone. We go with each other and we go with God, and along the way we become aware that Jesus is in our midst. It's time to become the Church of Jesus Christ.



References:

1 Kirk Kilpatrick, as quoted by Dennis Covington, "What Do Coincidences Really Mean?" Redbook, August 1995, 44.



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