

Sunday, March 8, 2020

Genesis 12:1-4

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

John 3:1-17

Transformational Journeys

“The Family Circus” is a beloved syndicated comic strip created in 1960 by cartoonist Bill Keane. Since Bill's death in 2011, it is currently written, inked, and colored by his son, Jeff Keane. This cartoon depicts a family and its every day activities and often with Christian themes. But a favourite panel often presented is of the journey of one of the children Billy. Mom asks: “Billy, I’ve been worried about you! Where have you been?” “Just walkin’ home from the bus stop.” In the cartoon you see a dark broken line from the bus stop to places in the neighbourhood where Billy went- seeing others working, playing with other kids, and stopping to see others as he skips rope, and even goes around a tree. Billy’s walk from the bus stop after school is very long, and as he makes his way home he stops and visits and even though we don’t know any of the conversations which might have taken place, this little boy has truly had a journey.

We are all on a journey together. We call it life and particularly in these days, we are living as a church family in this time and in this place walking together through Lent 2020. But what is significant about this? What does this part of our life’s journey- our walk through these 40 days leading to Holy Week mean in comparison to the rest of our lives? For some people these Lenten days will not have any impact at all. For others these Lenten days will be transformational to their whole existence. It all depends upon whether the hearts of people are open to receiving Christ Jesus or whether they truly want to live in a different manner than what it is they are currently experiencing.

Many people have GPS navigational tools, or devices which are to help us find our way while driving. If the driver follows the path laid out by this tool, there is not usually too much of a chance to get lost. But if the driver turns a different way than suggested, the voice states, “re calculating, re calculating” until such time a new plan of getting from point A to point B is derived.

This seems to be the case for people today. We are often recalculating the direction and the distance we really want to go, especially if we don’t choose to fully follow the call of Jesus.

Our Genesis reading reminds us of Abram’ decision to leave the familiar and journey to the land that God would show him. We might ask the simple question why? Why did God call to

Abram and say to him, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Why would God ask Abram to leave home?

Because God had a plan for this faithful man. God had a plan where Abram would be the father of a great nation, his name would be great and he would be blessed. It would be through Abram that all the families of the earth would be blessed. But why this man? We are not fully told in Genesis but many years later, it is Paul who writing to the Christians in Rome, cites Abram now Abraham as an example of a good man. Paul states. "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Abraham did not inherit the world through the law (as the heir) but through the righteousness of faith that is, by faith. Abraham became the father of many nations because he lived his life for God. He is called righteous because he did not hesitate to do what God asked him to do.

What happens when you are asked to do something different? Maybe it is a person with whom you are acquainted with through a group of people you like to share ideas with, or maybe a special activity- sports, cards, eating out, whatever. What happens if you are asked to do something not in your regular routine of everyday living? How do you react to the suggestion? How do you respond? Do you do it with enthusiasm or do you weigh the pros and cons of the task, than analyse it some more then do nothing.

We are on this journey of Lent which leads us on the path of discovering Jesus and people in the Bible who had choices to make- difficult choices. Last week it was Jesus who was tempted to make bread out of stones, who was testing God, and who was asked to worship Satan. But he did not give in to those temptations. Today we've heard of Abram's call to go where God would lead him to create a new nation of people. How could Abram leave all he had and go? How could he create a new nation of people when he and his wife Sarai had no children? Why did he have to leave the familiar and go? Because he had faith- strong enough to carry him through everything that might occur and did occur while they traveled to their new land.

As we walk this journey together, are you finding yourself on the edge with decisions to be made that are difficult? Maybe you are at a crossroads in your faith and are unsure about what to path to take? Which path leads to Jesus' plan for you? What about the other path; wouldn't it be easier to go that way? Wouldn't it be easier not to follow Jesus on this path of life or even to the cross?

Nicodemus was uncertain about some aspects of his faith. He was a leader in the synagogue but he had heard Jesus teach and preach and had questions. He could have just ignored these thoughts but Jesus' words within him would not go away. So in the evening after

dark he secretly meets Jesus to talk about what he had been teaching. He was not sure about the Holy Spirit which comes down as we open our hearts in prayer, the need to be born again spiritually and to discover and experience the joy that all who follow Jesus have and known. He was a faithful man- a good man and yet he did not understand what Jesus taught about spiritual rebirth. His life's journey was typical for a Jewish man- raised in the synagogue, taught and educated well, supported in his role within the community and a leader amongst others in the synagogue and amongst his peers. Yet Jesus changes his heart because he is open to receive Jesus' message of love, hope, peace and joy. Jesus knows Nicodemus' heart is good but now Nicodemus knows how to cleanse his heart from sin and feel a new beginning instilling within him, a faith capable of anything.

But what about you? Is your life journey on track with Jesus? Maybe you've had few detours in your life and questioned your faith in God. Maybe you have strayed even further because of the influences of others in your life yet you knew you were missing Jesus and the calming spiritual presence of God. Maybe just maybe you have questions like Nicodemus, and are searching for answers. Or maybe just like Abram your ready for the next step in your life's journey—whether that is amongst your Christian friends, or even when you will meet Jesus.

This Lenten journey is your journey. As we make our way through these encounters with Jesus we need to pause for a few minutes and look at where you started and then really see which direction you are headed. In order to make a straight line, one needs to join two points. But as we journey through Lent and set our eyes on Jesus we might have the broken dotted line like little Billy. Yet what is different is how far we really stray from our faith and live out our faith in wherever we say or do. Is there a different side of you away from where you, the church or even your closest friends? How do you account for the whole you? And from a different perspective what would God say to you? Would you be pleased in and for your life?

Little Billy's journey in the neighbour was very short yet caused his mother to worry. Your life is planned by God and you do not know how many years you have been given. We are called to be transformed by Christ's passion and light but only if we can say yes to God. Under what circumstance do you find yourself? Like Abraham faithful and righteous without question? Or like Abram beginning a new journey to the unknown? Or maybe you are like Nicodemus you get the main things about Jesus but the Holy Spirit and new life? What does this mean? How does this part of your life's journey show transformation or change? What is the old self saying to the new you?

As we prepare to receive Christ's gift to us in the bread and juice of holy communion- we seek to be transformed, changed and renewed in His Spirit. Are we ready to receive within us

what need? This is the bread for the journey which leads us to Holy Week- the cross and the empty tomb. This is the cup of forgiveness which takes away all sin and sets you on a clear path with Jesus. God is leading us all on this transformational journey. We need only to trust the Spirit to guide us as we encounter Jesus in new ways and on the edge of glory.

Let us pray.

God hear my prayer...I am seeking you; renewing my faith in you, trusting in you.

Bless me anew and cause me to be transformed this day so that as I am seeking you this wilderness Lenten time will lead me to you and a stronger righteous faith. Hear my prayer.....

Amen.