

Sunday, JUNE 11, 2023 *“Packing to go with God”*

Genesis 12:1-9 Romans 4:13-25 Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

The temperatures are slowly increasing, the days leading to summer vacation are counted by school children of all ages and there are many thoughts of going to the beach or one or more of the many food festivals which will soon arise. Summer will soon be here but with it there are a lot of things to consider. Where, when, how and how much are just a few questions one might ask before the suitcases come out and the bags are filled. But what if you had to move out of your place where you call home in a matter of minutes what would you pack? What is needed and deemed essential? What are the things that become most important?

These questions of leaving in a hurry have been in the thoughts of people under different kinds of pressures throughout history. Think about Noah and his family before the rain started- what did they need? Certainly raincoats and boots at first, but what about food and medicines for themselves or the animals? What about those who left on adventures and realized soon after that war was not an adventure but combat with death in many different ways—whether in trenches, in airplanes or small boats. What was deemed personal was minimal and often carried in what is considered a small tote bag today. In recent days we have heard of people having to flee their homes because of forest fires, flooding due to war destruction and even because there is political turmoil pending in legislative buildings around the world. People flee their countries and homes for many reasons but what is deemed essential? And how would we define what is needed as we follow God in faith?

As a student minister I was told- don't bring much to your first placement—clothes and of course the Bible. This was before the days of internet and computer. I wanted to pack reference books and anything I could read. But the reality was that what I needed to learn was not in books- but with the people I was sharing with. They were correct but in order to help the many people I have since met in these in between years was in books which definitely help today, helping as people search for answers to questions which were never asked or were hidden out of fear. This is why it is important to consider what one packs with them on life's journey!

Abram and Sarai were called by God to leave their home country leaving his kindred and father's house. At age 75 they travelled with their nephew Lot, their possessions and the persons they had acquired to go to the land of Canaan. They settled between Bethel and Ai and worshiped God. Then they continued their journey to where God was leading them. What had they taken with them? They were moving households and so even those that were servants would also be going as Abram and Sarai needed their help. They really didn't know where they were going but they knew that they had to follow. Their faith in God was strong and they knew that God would after them. But how difficult was it to move?

Today's families have a lot of stuff and depending upon where they go not all of it could or should make the trip. Sometimes a journey away from home means leaving things there in order to appreciate them more later on.

Abram, Sarai and Lot did not think about taking everything- they just did. God continued to call them on their journey – into Egypt and the land of the Negev River. It is there that they separated and set up their homesteads. It is God who spoke to Abram his covenant—that he would be the ancestor of multitude of nations. And why did they go? Because of their faith in God knowing that God would look after them.

How many of you have travelled for a vacation and you know where you are going but the weather is somewhat unpredictable? What do you do? You pack everything- from clothes for when it is hot to clothes for the evening chills. Depending upon when you are travelling you might even pack coats, mitts, boots or sandals and shoes. The idea is not to pack too much but just enough to see you through the time.

Some of you might travel this summer or later on into the fall. Yet what is important is not what you pack in your suitcase, but what your mind and heart are willing to receive. When you consider your journey you aren't totally letting go of everything but what you are doing is seeking a change, a rest, a slow down time and a time to rejuvenate and reassess who you are in this time. It might also be a time for healing- mind, heart, physical and mental and spiritual.

This was the case with those whom Jesus met as he was walking along. Matthew a tax collector was sitting at his booth and Jesus called to him- "follow me." He got up and followed. Later, Jesus sat down with tax collectors and sinners and the disciples. Pharisees commented to upset Jesus as sitting with sinners. But Jesus responded—that it is the sick who need a physician. Who was being healed or considering their life's journey and made a choice? Matthew. He left the old way of life and followed Jesus. The Pharisees heard Jesus' reasoning but were just not convinced about who he was.

Later, as Jesus was teaching, a synagogue leader came in and knelt down and showed respect to Jesus as teacher. By sharing that even though his daughter had just died, he believed that Jesus could raise her from death. As Jesus got up and followed the leader to his house, a crowd grew around him. As the crowd grew they were curious as to what Jesus was going to do for this synagogue leader who respected Jesus and believed him to be more than just another teacher.

In the meantime, a woman who practised good self-talk and who had been suffering for 12 years came up and reached for Jesus' cloak. She had stated to herself that "if only I touch his cloak I will be made well." Jesus knew that something had happened, he turned to her and told her that her faith had made her well- she was immediately healed physically. This woman who had suffered a long time put what she had left onto Jesus- her faith. She believed because no one else could help her.

Upon arriving at the leader's house, musicians and people were sharing in mourning rituals as the girl had died. But Jesus told them to stop and go away because the girl was just sleeping. They laughed because they did not think it possible for Jesus to raise someone from death. But he went in and took her by the hand, the girl got up. She was alive. Whose faith became stronger? The synagogue leader, the people who saw this miracle and the little girl who would be able to tell this story. Then the people shared this story widely. All this took place while Jesus was walking along the community, seeing those in need and responding.

What might you see and do as you walk along in your everyday life? It's worth it to talk to people who might need your help, but most often then not, you will be the one blessed. You don't need to pack anything to do this. You just need to have faith that God will lead you to the people He wants you to meet, talk with and bring about a change.

Paul writes in Romans 4 that Abraham's faith was strong and that he believed that he would become the father of many people at age 100 without any children. Abraham did not waiver in faith but trusted God and grew in faith as he gave glory to God because he was convinced that God was going to do what he had promised. And he did.

This is also true also regarding Jesus God's Son who came to live to die and rise again for our sakes. By faith Jesus was handed over to die but also to rise again. He was raised from death to life so that we might be reconciled and justified by God in order to receive the promise of life eternal. So the question is how deep/strong/ is your faith?

As we continue to walk with God in faith, our life will take us to many places and we will see many people. God wants us to see the people with whom we may come in contact with and know that often what is evident is that they are needing to hear the Spirit speak through you and you to hear God's Spirit in them. Abram and Sarah packed up everything to begin a new life. God doesn't call everyone to do this, but we are called to explore new things so that we will grow in faith and give glory to God.

As disciples of Jesus, as people of faith we don't have to do this alone. We have each other and we can pray for each other as we walk and meet people who are in need. We truly are people on a journey and we are sharing this life together as people of faith, a church family who cares and the gift and promise of the Spirit which is in our midst.

Let us rejoice as we seek God's path for our journey now and in the days ahead. Let us pray:

God of grace and hope guide our steps as we walk following your path. Show us your way and enable us to grow in faith. Be with us O God as you call us to move as the Spirit leads. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.