

**TEXT: Genesis 12:1-9**

**TOPIC: God calls Abram to go to a land God will show him, and blesses Abram's name.**

**SUBJECT: The journey home means leaving what's been home to discover what home is.**

**TITLE: The Journey Home**

Somewhere I have a picture of the day I left for college from my parents' home in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. It's a picture mom took because my 1978 Chrysler Cordoba was loaded with things I thought I'd need as a college freshman. Truth be told: I overpacked.

To that point, I'd taken a few wrong roads in life. I'd done things I wished I hadn't that would take me to even darker places in the years ahead. Little did I know that that beautiful 1978 Chrysler Cordoba would end up like the "burned" cars that used to fascinate me as a child, about a month from that day I left home.

That day I left for college, I thought Scottsbluff would always be home. It was where I'd grown up. It's where most of my childhood memories were formed. It was where my family was from, even though none of my siblings lived there anymore.

That day I left the only home I remembered at the time. Since then, the concept of home has challenged to the point I've wondered what home really is. For me, it's been an "I still haven't found what I'm looking for" thing. Maybe it's the way God wired me. Maybe God wired all of us that way, I don't know.

Maybe the concept of home is challenging because it's a homing beacon God uses to remind us of who we are and whose we are. If we look at Abram's call in Genesis 12, I think there's good reason to wonder why that might be.

Abram's story in Genesis is approximately 4,000-years-old. Abram's family were nomads who left Ur of the Chaldeans, possibly somewhere in what today is eastern Iraq, to settle in Haran, which today is believed to be along Turkey's border with Syria. When Abram's father,

Terah, died, Abram heard a call from God to “leave your country, your people, and your father’s household to go to the land” God would show him. Jews, Christians and Muslims all identify Abram as their founding father.

Basically, what God is instructing Abram to do is to give up everything that’s familiar for everything that’s unfamiliar. I know when I left home for college, leaving home meant leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar. As a 50-something-adult-male, I realize now how that wasn’t the only time I would be asked to give up the familiar for the unfamiliar. As an itinerant pastor, the unfamiliar is invigorating; I’ve learned to embrace it.

Which reminds me of the “all of life is a coming home” poem from the start of my favorite movie, *Patch Adams*. Would you read that with me today, please?

*All of life is a coming home. Salesmen, secretaries, coal miners, beekeepers, sword swallows – all of us. All the restless hearts of the world ... all trying to find a way home. It's hard to describe what I felt like then. Picture yourself walking for days in a driving snow. You don't even know you're walking in circles – the heaviness of your legs in the drifts; your shouts disappearing into the wind. How small you can feel. How far away home can be.*

*Home. The dictionary defines it as both a place of origin ... and a goal or destination. And the storm? The storm was all in my mind. Or, as the poet Dante put it ... "In the middle of the journey of my life I found myself in a dark wood ... for I had lost the right path." Eventually I would find the right path ... but in the most unlikely place.*

I tend to think Abram’s story signifies a turning point in Genesis. Prior to chapter 12, God made every attempt to get along with humanity as a whole. Since God created humans not to be robots who would always do God’s will, but as independent thinkers who would go as far as to flaunt God’s will, that’s what humans tend to do. When humans actually think critically for

themselves, it can be a beautiful thing. When people engage in group-think while living apart from God, you end up with Adam and Eve and their dysfunctional family and relationship with God, as well as human beings who pursue pleasure on one hand (Genesis 6) and power on the other (Genesis 11). In chapter 12, God changes course with Abram.

As a whole, humanity does not always value what God values. God values love, goodness, justice, fairness, and holiness, to name a few. As scripture suggests, people seek pleasure and certainty, until they discover the significance of a relational Creator. Abram's journey took him from a heart curved in on himself to a homeward-destined heart open to loving God, others, and self. In other words, there comes a point where people have to learn to see beyond their immediate concerns and learn to care about the needs of others more than their pet projects. That's why the stars in the sky matter to Abram. Seeing the stars is about seeing the needs of others above and beyond what you think your needs are. It's a fundamental concept within religious belief.

Maybe that's what it means to leave home. Maybe that's why people get homesick. It seems to me that the journey home means rejecting what the world tells us is important, so we can experience how important it is to get comfortable with the unfamiliar. I got comfortable with the unfamiliar when I volunteered to serve the homeless in Kansas City. I got comfortable with the unfamiliar when I went to Haiti and experienced what life is like in a developing nation. I got comfortable with the unfamiliar visiting war-torn Liberia. I've enjoyed being comfortable with the unfamiliar every time I've taken confirmation classes to Kansas City to be exposed to homelessness, refugees, war violence, religions, and the unfamiliar, which has always changed young people's lives and often their parents' lives.

As I see it, one problem in our culture is that people expect everything to be familiar – families, education and employment – which is actually the opposite of the journey home God calls Abram to take. Our culture, political leaders, education and employment almost always tell us to veer away from the unknown for what's known. Almost everything in the world tells us to pursue what we don't have, so we go after and get everything we want even when it's something we don't necessarily need. Human stubbornness to live apart from God tells us to remove the strange and unpredictable for the guarantee of safety and security because too often people demand certainty only to act timidly.

The opening words of our reading today – “leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you” – are *lekh lekha* which represent an ambiguous instruction to Abram that mean “go for yourself” or “go to yourself.” Going for yourself or going to yourself means giving up everything, so Abram can be in tune with God's values. Just as my parents sent me off to college, the journey from home – every time you leave home – is for your own good. *Every time you leave home, the journey means you are to bless others*, just like it was for Abram.

When I think about it, the journey home hasn't been just leaving what's familiar. My journey home has been about realizing what was once familiar becomes unfamiliar, and what has been unfamiliar has become familiar. Familiarizing myself with the unfamiliar is a journey of faith, just as it was for Abram. Getting familiar with the unfamiliar has brought me more and more to myself, which is a coming home of sorts. The same was true for Abram and his wife, Sarai; maybe that's why they become Abraham and Sarah in time. Maybe that's why Abraham and Sarah go from being barren and childless to being parents.

Just before I started my doctorate, I visited my childhood home in Scottsbluff. It's changed a lot over the years, to the point that I drove right past it. I took the risk of going up to the door and the people who lived there invited me in and gave me a tour of the house. I hardly recognized it; their home is not the home I remember, and that's OK. But it made me realize home is somewhere other than Scottsbluff, and I'm OK with that, too.

Realizing that made me wrestle with what home is. So, this week I asked folks "what is home?" For some, it's security. For some, it's family. A couple people said home is contentment. One person said "home is where the heart is." Another person suggested home is a place where love dwells. For one friend, home has become a memory. For another, home is where their roots are. On one of my favorite TV shows, it was suggested that for a nomad, home isn't a place but a person.

Given Abram's story I can't help but wonder if home isn't something people discover in the most unlikely place and among the most unlikely people, just like the poem we read earlier suggests. After all, Abram journeyed from what he knew to what he didn't know; Abram journeyed from the comfortable to the strange and uncomfortable as Hebrews 11 suggests.

Should it be any different for us? Maybe for some it will be, and maybe for others, it won't. Whatever the case, though, may faith be what guides us along the journey home.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.