

12 weeks of leading up to the Resurrection

Quick tour of the path to Christ.

The journey from Abraham to Jesus

See God's hand in this and his plan for the salvation of the world.

Learn from the strengths and the weaknesses of the great saints.

See what it teaches us about faith.

So we begin with the father of faith Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-9 and Galatians 3:6-9.

161 – *O God our help in ages past*

Abraham - Leave All

Faith involves a cross to carry – a place to leave and hope for the future.

One word was to transform Abraham's life and that was the word LEAVE...

Leave what Abram?

Leave your country, your family, your Father's house...there was a lot to leave and a lot to set aside but that was the word that came to Abram, if it were not for the faith of this one man who was prepared to give his all and to get up and leave, where would we be today?

This has been the story of men and women of faith ever since. They have heard God speaking into their hearts to leave, and so they have left behind, the most precious things that this world has to offer.

But it is not a blind faith, in that there is no guidance or direction, for God tells Abram to head for a land that He would show him.

It's a great faith that Abram has, because he trusts in a great God. He trusts in a God that could move mountains, a God who was so real to him that he knew that this God would be with him in his journey.

12 weeks' time, we will be celebrating the resurrection – yes Easter Sunday, not that far away, and before that we will have Holy Week and six weeks of Lent, times of preparation for the greatest event in our church's calendar.

Our journey to Easter starts this week.

Week twelve starts with Abram's journey, and over the other weeks leading up to Easter, we will engage with other great people of the Bible and see how God called them and worked in their lives.

We are part of this great Biblical history. We are all also the people of faith, people who have their roots in the Abrahamic faith. He has been called the Father of faith and he is an example for us all of what it means to sacrifice all and follow God.

Was he scared?

We are not told, but he must have had his moments, the time when he was called to sacrifice his own son Isaac....Walking on the journey of faith, disturbing and challenging, if it's not, then we are not really on the journey.

For the majority of us to go somewhere that we don't know would leave us scared. Familiarity may breed contempt but it also brings us a sense of security and the thought of venturing out into uncharted waters can be a daunting challenge which, if we are honest, most of us prefer to avoid.

It is said that moving house is one of the most stressful things that anyone can encounter. But to move house and not know where you are going must multiply the stress.

Come and follow me, said Jesus, take up your cross and come after. Nowhere did Jesus promise that following him would be an easy path. He always spelled out that it was a road into the unknown, a road even of suffering and challenge - not for the faint hearted.

We may wonder why the Christian faith doesn't appeal to everyone and here is one of the main reasons. There happens to be a cross at the centre of the Christian faith. A cross which speaks of suffering. We must be prepared like Abraham, to take up our cross daily, if we would follow where God leads.

Now it is very easy for me to say these words, from the comfort of the Manse study, but if I'm honest, I struggle with them also. Like most people, I like my security, my warmth, my family comforts, and to be challenged out of the nest is not an easy decision, even for a minister. It is easy to forget this challenge, that we are called to take up our cross and leave all and follow Christ.

Perhaps this is the call that churches and Christians need to hear loud and clear today, the call of Christ upon our lives, to daily surrender to him and to take our cross and follow him.

Faith involves a movement forward – it's the only way to grow.

But it is the only way that Abram was to grow in his faith. As long as a boat stays safely moored in a harbour it will never be used for what it was intended for, and that is to sail on the wide sea. As long as a bird stays in a nest it will never be what God intended it to be, a bird soaring high in the sky.

The mothers of young eaglets make the wise choice of breaking up the nest when the young are ready to fly. They make it so uncomfortable for the young eaglets to stay in the nest, that they have no option but to take that first flight and fly into the sky.

Hearing the call of Christ to come and follow him is the way to Christian growth. It takes us beyond our Sunday School faith and takes us into an environment where we need to depend on God for everything. When we are pushed out from our safe surroundings, with nothing but God to trust in, then our faith grows from a small acorn to a large oak. This is a master principle of life writes FB Meyer, a great preacher of a past generation.

Abram could never have become Abraham the great father of faith if he had remained in Haran. No, he had to make that step out of this city and leave behind everything that was familiar, and to step out trusting in the voice, in the word that he knew to be real. *Abram leave everything and go and I will lead you!*

God doesn't call everyone to leave all behind, family, homes and country. It may not be necessary for us to leave all, to leave our homes and our comforts, but it may be necessary for us to withdraw from anything that prevents us from having a life of faith. If we are to learn how to trust in God and to develop our faith, it may well be that God asks us to give up certain things that prevent him from being heard. It may be that our journey is not so much physical but spiritual. It may be a journey not to the land of Canaan but to that place where we can meet with God in prayer.

It is on our knees and before the living God that we begin our journey of growth. Often God brings us to our knees and through life circumstances, it is there that we begin to depend upon the living God.

How many folks have had to reach rock bottom before they have turned and submitted their lives to God?

But we don't need to reach rock bottom, all we need to do is to hear him say, *leave all and I will show you the way forward.*

530 – *One more step along the world I go*

Faith involves a promise – a word to be trusted.

Abram's call was accompanied by a promise. He trusted in God's word. He trusted in God's promise and what was God's promise to him?

I will make you into a great nation...

This is where God begins his plan for his church. He begins with the obedience of one man. One man whom he trusts and gives to him a promise.

I will make you.

When we take up our cross and follow Christ, yes, we may lose much of the values of this world but we gain so much of heavenly value.

“What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his soul” said Jesus.

You see, Abram went forward believing that God was going to make him. God was in this with him and he was going to work through Abram to create something of great value, a nation of people who belong to God. A people who are his children.

All because of Abram's faithfulness, God was at work and Abram responds, and so we are here today as part of the great family of Abram. We are sheltering under the umbrella of Abram's faith and we are part and parcel of this promise, that God will make a great nation. Only in heaven will we truly understand the ramifications of this great promise, and Abram's obedience, when every tribe and race shall bow before the throne and sing Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord.

Then all our world possessions will seem so inadequate and trite compared to what God has in store for us. For Abram is the Father of this great nation and as he was blessed, so will we be.

What comes out of this great promise to Abram is the number of times and ways that God is going to bless his people, and that his people become a blessing to others.

Who are we being a blessing to today? Is our faith a blessing to our families? Are they being blessed through our love and obedience to God?

A blessing is simply God's favour resting upon us. It is the most wonderful thing in the world. St Francis de Sales once wrote, "When the house is on fire, men are ready to throw everything out of the window; and when the heart is full of God's love, men are sure to count all else but worthless."

Faith involves God – He directs us forward – He has a plan

Finally, friends, faith involves God. Of course it does, you may well say, but for many people faith is simply putting strength in their own character, in their personality, in somehow mustering up strength from within, but Christian faith is looking away from ourselves and learning to trust God for everything.

When I was a very young Christian, I encountered an older and more experienced man, who knew of my Christian faith and he was into eastern religions and he said to me, it's important to have faith, even if it's in a tin of beans. I wasn't able to respond to him but now I would be able to say, can a tin of beans save your soul? Can a tin of beans guide you through life? Can a tin of beans lead you to a promised land?

Abram trusted God to be his strength and our shield.

We began with Abram being told to leave all. He was from first to last separated. Separated from his fatherland...and family, he was to become separated from his nephew Lot, and throughout his life separated as a pilgrim and stranger. His life wasn't perfect, he made mistakes and bad judgements and yet throughout it all, God was making him into a great nation. Throughout it all he was brought into closer fellowship with God...

In the book of Hebrews written at the beginning of the early church, it was written, in chapter 11:

⁸ *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.* ⁹ *By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a*

foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she[b] considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

And Paul writing to the Galatians, as we heard read, exhorts them to consider Abraham who believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

My friends, in the words of Andrew Scobie, former minister of Cardross Church, *“Look forward in faith, all time is in God's hand. Walk humbly with him and trust his future plan. God has wisely led his people by his power. Look forward in hope, he gives us each new hour.*

Look forward in faith, the world is in God's care. His purpose of love he calls on us to share. In our neighbour's need the Lord is present still. He blesses the meek! The earth will know God's will.

Look forward in faith, God gives us life each day. Go onward with Christ, his Spirit guides our way. Now God lets us live within the sphere of grace. Trust ever in him, he rules over earth and space.”

At the start of a new year and as we journey towards Easter, may we also hear the same words as Abram, leave behind all the things that prevent you from having a life of faith, and come and follow me and I will lead you, bless you and make you.

Amen.

237 - Look forward in faith

562 – Through the love of God