

Just Go  
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March 5, 2023- Lent 2A  
Genesis 12:1-4a; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

Human history is filled with stories of people who pick up and go to new places, so much so that migration is considered a rule rather than an exception. We're mostly creatures of habit, albeit curious ones. Given the ability to see what's over the next hill, or the chance to make a better life for ourselves and our families, we readily pull up our tent stakes, pack up the camels, and head off in the direction of the promised new and wonderful things. John F. Kennedy, in a 1962 speech which marked the groundbreaking for what's now known as the Johnson Space Center in Houston, mused: "Why climb the highest mountain? Why... fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas?... The great British explorer, George Mallory, who was to die on Mount Everest, was asked why did he want to climb it? He said, 'Because it is there.'"<sup>1</sup>

Moving across the desert to some unknown land "because it is there" is where we meet Abram, soon to be renamed Abraham, son of Terah, husband of Sarai, and uncle of Lot. He's living in Haran with his family when God tells him to pick up and go to a land that God would show him. Abram's goal isn't some great exploration of a place he's only heard of in story and song, or because it's there. God tells him to do it. At its heart this, is a "call story", one where God interacts directly with a human in a particular time and a particular place, and for a particular purpose. The Book of Genesis provides the who and the what. The Letter to the Romans, written several centuries later, follows

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Kennedy, "We Choose to Go to the Moon." <https://www.rice.edu/jfk-speech> [accessed March 2, 2023].

up on that by reminding readers that faith alone is what does it for Abraham. It's precisely that faith, especially contexts where the Law is either nonexistent or not applicable, which is still enough where God is concerned.

Abram's story actually begins a few verses back from where our excerpt picks up. His father, Terah, appears at the end of a which goes all the way back to Noah – yep, THAT Noah – and his son Shem. The genealogy ends by describing how Terah started the long trip to Canaan from his homeland in Ur of the Chaldeans after the death of Abram's brother Haran. Ironically, he stops and settles in a place that's also named Haran. It's only after Terah himself dies there that God shows up out of the blue and tells Abram to get moving: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen 12:1, NRSV) - a land which turned out to be the very same one Terah had been headed for when he decided to stay put. Clearly God had something much larger in mind than just a new homestead for Abram and his household with this call: "I will make of you a great nation," God says, "and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (Gen 12:2).

This is one of the pivotal moments in Genesis. God makes the promise of land, descendants, and blessing, which would be carried by Abram and every subsequent generation of his family. It links the creation story, Adam and Eve, and Noah and the Flood to the narratives about Abram and his descendants which will follow, and it points toward the later history of Israel as a so-called great nation.<sup>2</sup> Setting aside the challenges that it involves around taking possession of land which is already occupied,

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<sup>2</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, "Commentary on Genesis 12:1-4a." <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/second-common-lectionary/second-sunday-in-lent/commentary-on-genesis-121-4a-5> [accessed February 28, 2023].

and how poor Sarai has zero say in this adventure, do you notice how God just sort of shows up, out of the blue, with a massive request, and how Abram just goes, with no questions asked? It's a little bit like Kennedy urging his listeners to press on toward the audacious goal of landing people on the moon. For those involved in making Apollo happen, they pursued their goal as if they were called to that purpose in the same way Abram was called to his. Just as it never occurred to Abram that God hadn't sent him off on some sort of wild goose chase, it never occurred to the engineers, scientists, flight controllers, or the astronauts themselves that it couldn't be done, despite the countless obstacles they encountered along the way.

Trust is the defining factor in all of this – most especially the absolute trust Abram places in God. It's what defines Abram, as well as his long relationship with God. For God's part, God uses this trust as the basis for everything else that is to come for Abram, including this request to just pick up and go, the request to sacrifice his only son Isaac in Genesis 22, and the blessings later extended through Isaac and the rest his descendants. It's through that relationship of absolute trust, which God reckoned to Abram as righteousness, that God "[offers] life to people in the death of alienation and lostness and makes possible the miracle of a new beginning... It just needs us to believe in this love. Then something new begins as we are swept into a sphere of a powerful transforming love and find ourselves with other 'growers'... all on the way and together in an ongoing process of allowing the same goodness of God... to come into reality within and through us."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> William Loader, "First Thoughts on Year A Epistle Passages from the Lectionary: Lent 2." <https://billloader.com/AEpLent2.htm> [accessed February 27, 2023].

That kind of faith is one of the most powerful forces in the world when it comes to enabling ordinary people do to extraordinary things. It allowed Abram and his immediate family to overcome their foibles and go on to be the ancestors of most of the major faith traditions in the world. It allowed the cast of thousands tasked with putting people on the moon and bringing them home safely what they needed to believe that it could be done. Just imagine what it can do for us, if we're willing to engage with it.