

Blazin' Trails

Sunday, August 7, 2016; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Ken McGarry

In today's scripture lesson from the Epistle to the Hebrews, we were reminded of the faith of Abraham. He was called by God to leave his country and family and his father's house (Gen 12:1). This would have been no easy task as these were blessings upon him, and to leave them would be to leave these earthly blessings behind. He would have to trust in an unseen God's promise of offering even greater blessing through his journey.

But Abraham, then called Abram, meaning "the father is exalted," did leave his father's household and his homeland. Trusting in God, he journeyed away from all that he had known toward a destination known only by God.

I imagine that Abraham, as he traveled from his homeland, came to many different crossroads and forks. Some of those paths surely led to good places—verdant, green lands teeming with life where Abraham could have settled down, built up his wealth, and lived the good life—but God called him to move on to the place of God's own choosing. And so Abraham trusted in God and moved on.

Because of his faith, he moved; because of his faith, he found greater blessing as an exalted father of many children and a source of blessing for the whole world.

As spiritual children of Abraham, we have been blessed through his willingness to trust and obey God's call upon him. And as the apple falls not far from the tree, we are to take up the family trait of trusting and obeying God's calling upon our own lives, even when God calls us to take difficult journeys to unknown or undesired places.

Sometimes, like Abraham's path, our journey will lead us to a fork in the road. The good advice given to us by the great Yogi Berra is that "when you come to a fork in the road, take it!" Seek to discern God's leading in your life and the path that leads to the blessing of others and world around you, but seek this not just to know the way, but so as to move there. And when the road becomes unclear or becomes no road at all; when there is no solid path beneath you and there are no forks before you, move on still. Blaze a trail through the wilderness toward a place of greater blessing.

As many of you know, my journey with you is soon coming to an end. Soon, we will travel on, but in different directions. Although the future is unseen for the church, as it is for Christine and me, we know that God is calling us all to move on to good places, filled with blessing and life, and we will continue to blaze trails through the wilderness, moving forward to carry God's blessing to others around us and leaving a good path that others may follow.

This morning, we celebrate our different journeys and the blessing that comes through them as we join together to receive the sacrament of communion. Together, we remember the journey of Christ that led him to the cross, where he experienced brokenness and sorrow and now blesses us with solidarity with God in our own times of suffering or distress. We remember that Jesus' journey did not end at the cross, which was merely a crossroads, as he continued on through his resurrection life and now blesses us with hope for renewal.

One good example of finding blessing in the journey can be found in one of my favorite characters, Forrest Gump. He was a man who knew a lot about journeys. As he stated, "My momma always said you can tell a lot about a person by their shoes. Where they're going, where they've been. I've worn lots of shoes." Indeed, Forrest wore many shoes on many journeys. One of his early

journeys came from breaking free from braces on his legs to run away from a gang of bullies; another was when his running abilities allowed him to become a star for his college football team. Forrest became a decorated war hero, was a ping-pong ace, captained a shrimping boat and founded the Bubba Gump Shrimp Company, ran across the country for two years, married and took care of his lifelong friend Jenny, and then raised their son Forrest, Jr. Mr. Gump was indeed a well-traveled man who wore lots of different shoes. Each pair, on each journey, was worn with boldness. Forrest moved boldly – he ran, really – throughout his life, and all of these journeys brought blessings to everyone around him.

When we perceive the calling of God in our lives, we ought to follow the good example of Forrest in strapping on a pair of shoes and moving boldly. We should follow the leading of our Lord and Brother Jesus Christ in moving selflessly. We should follow the way of Father Abraham in moving faithfully. In so doing, we will be blessed and we will be a blessing to the world around us. May we be blessed and be a blessing this morning. Amen.