

## **“A Call to a New Place”**

The lessons call attention to the election by God of a peculiar people, to Jesus' selection of his early disciples and to the nature of God's mission as we journey with him together.

### **I. Called From the Familiar to the Unfamiliar: Gen. 12:1-9**

During the early years of my ministry, I used to commute between two cities that were about 100 miles apart. Often I would fish on my way to and fro and provide fish for my parishioners on the one hand or for my family on the way back. One day, I stopped in a virgin area and fished for a few minutes in the south bar pit along the highway, but I caught nothing. Then I crossed over and started to fish on the north side of the highway. Still I caught nothing. Then I saw a road that led behind the northern bar pit. “Surely,” I said, “I can catch something on the wooded side of the North bar pit.” I entered the road and walked about a tenth of a mile but there were no openings. As a matter of fact, it was dark in there and the road was crisscrossed with spider webs. The only light came from a few beams that forced their way through the thick foliage. I was too far in to go back and I did not know what I had to face ahead. Then I heard two sound( a howl and a hoot). The hair stood up on the back of my head. ( I had hair then, you know). The rest of the story later.

Life exists on a continuum from the familiar to the unfamiliar- a constant journey of change and each of us must be prepared to make the transitions. Some do it willingly with excitement and adventure. Others find it hard as they struggle with anxieties and fears.

Over twenty five hundred years ago, a wandering Aramean received a call from God. He heard the voice of God calling him, promising him a new land, to make him the father of many nations and said that many nations would be blessed through him. At the age of seventy five, Abram took his nephew lot, his wife and their possessions and struck out for a land that they knew not. Now this is an infomercial to those who are beyond age of retirement. It is never to late to respond to God's call. When Abram and his company entered the land of the Canaan, who do you suppose they found there? The writer said, “At that time the Canaanites were in the land.” Genesis 12:6c. Therefore, Abram and his company passed straight through the land, stopping at Shechem, near the Oak of Moreh.

At Shechem, God showed Abram the land that his offsprings would inhabit and Abram built an altar to God there to seal the agreement. Finally, they moved on and pitched their tents between the two mountain peaks through which Joshua would enter the land centuries later to possess it. The rest of the journey toward the Negeb was in stages.

In the past few weeks you at St. Barnabas have started on a new journey. Your priest has retired, the Bishop has visited with you and you are now in the process of forming the structure for your new transition. The first thing that you need to remember is that God is with you, calling you into this new place. Secondly, the transition must be made in stages. It took the Israelites three to five hundred years to settle the land. Hopefully, yours will not take so long. Some who will start out with you may not be here when the journey is completed. Nevertheless, you will get there as one people. God's favor and blessings are with you.

## **II. God's Election and Favor: Romans 4:13-25**

**Upon what is election and favor with God based? Is it based upon our goodness, our keeping of the law or some rule of life? Can we by our piety merit God's favor? In Romans, Paul tried to convince his hearers that the promise of a land, posterity and election of Abraham and his descendants came not by Abram and Sarai's piety or their keeping of the Law, but by what Paul called the Righteousness of Faith in response to God. The election, land and a great posterity were based on God's grace, his undeserved love.**

**Today, we still wonder why many are called but only a few are chosen. This Righteousness of Faith as a response to God's call is not another work. It is a discernment and a response. It is a willingness to follow where God is leading the way. St. Barnabas must not look to the past to replicate it or to some hoped for future to download it. In stages, you must walk with God and with each other until God brings you to the twin peaks of your land of habitation-to your new priest it a new mission. So, as Israel was chosen to receive a land, heritage and a special role in God's salvation of the world, you too are called to faith in God, trust in one another and a discernment process as to what your new mission will be. Remember that Abraham did not know the place to which he was going nor what he was going to do. What he did know and trust in was God. Today, God is calling you to do no less. The real question is, are you willing to say yes to God, to move with faith in stages and to walk with God into your future?**

## **III. God is no respecter of persons. Matthew**

**In the Gospel lesson, Jesus goes beyond the pale of the religious establishment and selects one of his disciples from among the tax collectors. A ruler who believed that Jesus could revive his daughter received her whole again. And a woman who would have been considered in his time uncleaned was healed of 12 years of hemorrhaging by touching the hem of Jesus' garment. The call of a tax collector, revival of a ruler's daughter and the contact and healing of the hemorrhaging woman served to give notice that God's call and social contact was not and is not limited by our usual social constructs. Listen well for the leader that God will direct you to. As you open your doors and hearts to your future you must never forget that.**

**When we look at examples in the Bible, we have to conclude that God is no respecter of persons for his work. God chose a polygamist (Abraham) to be the father of many nations, a murderer (Moses) to deliver his people from bondage, a harlot and a foreign seductress (Rahab and Ruth) to be ancestors of David, an adulterous murderer (David) to be the greatest king of Israel and a young woman (Mary) whose child was not her husband's to be the mother of the God Child. Jesus chose a tax collector to be his fifth disciple. He chose to go into the home of one of the rulers to raise his daughter from her bed as part of his mission. And he endured a touch from an untouchable to demonstrate the healing power of the new kingdom.**

**Back to our fishing story-now halfway in and afraid of what was in the woods near me, I continued to walk toward the next bridge that was a mile from where I started. I never found an opening to the water, you know. Finally, near the next bridge, I found an opening**

**and safely exited the wooded area across a grassy plain and with much relief walked back to where I had parked my car. I caught no fish that day. As a matter of fact, I never fished there again. Nevertheless, I was the wiser for having had the adventure. And I definitely knew that God was watching over me.**

**St. Barnabas, Florissant is on another adventure and I hope that you will look expectantly with faith and the sure knowledge that you are not alone. God is with you preceding you, walking with you and welcoming you to a new place and a new day. So, as you stand between the twin peaks of the entrance to your promised land, let nothing hinder you from being all that God is calling you to be-the people of God in this place.**

**O God, who called the nation of Israel and Matthew the tax collector for special purposes: Be with the people of St. Barnabas in their time of transition. Give them a discerning mind, obedient wills, tender hearts, a clear vision and courageous actions for facing their future; we pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**