

Lent II
Genesis 12:1-4a
The Rev. Deacon Joshua Nelson
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The summer after my Junior Year at Lee I accepted a job as a boys cabin counselor at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp in Twin Lake, Michigan

I had never been to the camp before. I'd never even been a counselor. I knew no one I would be working with. And I'd never been to that part of the country. I simply saw an advertisement in the music building and answered the call.

I loaded up my car with everything I thought I would need for a two month extended stay in the western Michigan woods. I turned over the ignition and began driving north. As I pulled onto the interstate near my parents home I thought, "Dear God, what have I done."

I was about to step into something completely unknown.

That summer ended up being one of the best times of my life. I made friends whom I still call upon today, I had the opportunity to affect the lives of many campers who still keep in touch, and the next few summers I kept going back for more. I was called into the wilderness, and it got a hold of me.

A few years later I was a first year teacher in Knoxville. It was a very rough year and I was considering other options for the next.

For some strange reason I kept feeling this draw to Notre Dame. I grew up near Columbus, Ohio --- Buckeye Country ---

I had no reason to even think about Notre Dame except that I like the movie Rudy.

I had no idea why my life should intersect with that university. All I knew was I could not shake the feeling that I needed to go to Notre Dame.

That summer I was working the Lee University Music Camp. In the midst of that week I learned that I would not be rehired to teach choir in Knoxville, and I needed to find some new employment. . . . quickly!

I spent every break I had that week applying to any private school music teaching jobs I could find, I became very disheartened as nearly every position I applied for turned me down because I had only been teaching for one year. I returned to my home in Knoxville to begin packing and a week later my parents helped move me out to return home with them.

We got back to Ohio on a Monday morning, and I had a phone call from a Catholic School in Indiana. They wished to interview me. I drove up the next day, interviewed on Wednesday, and was offered the job on Saturday. The school was in South Bend across the street from the University of Notre Dame.

At the start of August I moved into another unknown. Another wilderness --- a new adventure. And as I laid on an air mattress next to a folding camp chair, the only furniture in my apartment, I again asked the question, "Dear God, what have I done?"

I spent the next three years laughing, crying, cheering, and making music. I spent the next three years changing lives, and having my life changed.

Toward the end of my tenure, we as a school body worked to reexamine our school motto. After much discussion, the new motto we chose was a very spiritual one, "God Calls, We Answer." That was it, "God Calls, We Answer". It got me to listening for God's voice again and soon another call came. A call to another wilderness, another unknown. A call to ministry. A call to the priesthood. A call to seminary. A call to Sewanee.

Three years later, and I stand before you.

Now listening for another call discerning where the Lord will lead me next. Looking into another wilderness and standing at the deserts edge ready to answer.

The Lord said to Abram, "Go. . . ."

This was not the first time he moved into the unknown. When much younger, as we read in the previous chapter of Genesis, his father Terah moved Abram, his wife Sarai, Abram's nephew Lot and others of the extended family from Ur, in modern day Iraq to a city known as Haran, which is most likely in modern day Turkey. They had a good life there. And then Abram's father died. Abram became the head of the family, and when he was 75 the Lord called him into a new adventure. Abram moved his household into that unknown.

On that first day when they began moving south, I wonder if Abram had that same thought I did. As he turned around to see any semblance of Haran fade into the waxy edge of the desert horizon, I like to think he looked to the sky above and said, "Dear God, what have I done."

Life in the wilderness was long and not easy. It took them on many twist and turns, new destinations, new unknowns, but many great adventures.

It is in the unknowns. It is in the wilderness that we grow
we learn
we listen
and we answer.

Abram became Abraham. The childless son became the father of many ---as Abraham means in Hebrew. He learned, often through mistakes, how to trust in God. He learned to listen and to answer. *The Lord said to Abram, "Go ... "* And Abram went.

Last week we began the journey into Lent. A journey that is unique to each person. A journey full of unknowns - full of doubt - full of changes - and if we allow it . . . full of growth.

We know the destination. We are all moving toward the hope of the resurrection in Easter. But none of us will take the same path. And none of us will be the same when we get there.

Where is God calling you?

Have you been called to give up something? To take on something? Have you been called to step back, or to go forward? Take some time this week to examine these questions. What is God calling you to? Where are you to go?

Each year we are called into Lent. We are called to seek God in a deeper way. We are called to quiet our lives and listen for God's voice. The forty days of Lent are often compared to time in the desert. It is in that space that we run into obstacles and must trust in God. It is also where we must learn to confront our own demons, our questions, our doubts, our temptations, and, yes, our sins. It is in the wilderness of Lent that we stop, take stock, and exclaim, "Dear God, what have I done?"

But if we listen closely we are called to keep going. We are called to repent. to listen, to learn, and to grow. It is in the desert times of our lives that we learn to lean on God for forgiveness, wisdom, and strength for the journey.

Do not be afraid or disheartened by the unknown challenges of Lent, rather be excited about the great adventure before you. God is calling . . . How will you answer? Step into the unknown. Get to know the stranger. Trust in God and try something that scares you. And when God calls Answer!

AMEN

