

***Ready, Set, GO!!***©**Genesis 12:1-4; Romans 4:13-25****September 16, 2018****Dr. Sharlyn Gates**

This past July, I attended a continuing education event at Lake Tahoe, NV. It was my first time there and I was quite taken by the beauty of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the very blue water of the lake.

As is usually the case, there was a welcome packet with a letter of instructions, including a map of Zephyr Point – which is a Presbyterian Conference Center. There was also big, full sheet of paper warning about the bears that wandered around the place at night.

“Carry a flashlight and don’t leave doors open, or food around,” was the advice. “If you see a bear just nonchalantly clap your hands and flash your flashlight at him and he will probably mosey along. The key, people said, is to not surprise the bear with your presence. Those bears are more afraid of us than we are of them, they said.

Maybe, but I was pretty sure I’d be the one to run.

During breaks, I would go for a walk to get some exercise, as we had been sitting most of the time. I walked up the hill, past the gift shop and the beach to an entry way where I thought we had driven in when we arrived. This was always in broad daylight.

On Wednesday we had the entire afternoon and evening free. I hung around at the beach a little while then and got ready for a night out with some other women. One of the women had a car there and drove us to a nice restaurant north of where we were staying. It was beautiful and a delightful evening.

I enjoyed the food and the companionship of other women pastors, but I was ready to go back and rest and go over the part I had in worship the next morning.

One of the women in our car wanted to be let off at another restaurant where a group from our seminar was hanging out, but it turned out it we had passed it. Our driver pulled into the entry of Zephyr Point to turn around and I asked her to just let me out so I could walk to our lodge and get ready for bed. They double checked with me to see if I really was comfortable with finding my way back and I assured them I had walked it a couple of times and would be fine.

So, I got out of the car and they left. I stood there getting my bearings for a minute. I realized it was way darker than I thought. And, there were several roads to choose from, which I had not remembered at all.

“This must be the one,” I said to myself. So, I started down that road with only a little light shining from the moon. I went just a short way and began to question if that really was the right road. It didn’t look familiar, but it was dark, after all. I’d only seen it in the daylight.

I went a bit further and decided to turn around and start over. When I got back to my beginning point I carefully analyzed all the roads. That one isn't it because I never walked past the big parking lot, I reasoned. (It was lit up and would have been a good choice).

This one up here is more dirt than pavement and it's narrow. I'm sure that's not it. Eventually, I decided the one I originally took had to be the right one. So, I started walking again. It was certainly a rougher road than I remembered.

And where was the beach? And the gift store? It was dark and deserted and I started thinking – I started thinking – about bears. I figured I just might be the one person in the news the next day that a bear at Zephyr Point finally decided to attack. The one that wasn't as afraid of me as I was of it.

I had no flashlight to see it in advance, to know it was there. I would probably just walk in the dark until I bumped smack dab into it. Both of us surprised. That could not possibly end good.

So, I just started clapping. I walked on the dark, rough path, trying not to stumble, clapping my hands, and praying for guidance and safety.

Pretty soon I came around a bend and there were cabins! Lots of cabins and lights and laughter and talking coming from inside. And, there were many cars parked along the road by the cabins, which told me I was definitely on the wrong road because all the cars on the road that led to our lodge were required to be parked down there in that lit up parking lot!

And then I looked ahead and realized that the road I was on came abruptly to a dead end.

About the time I was deciding I would have to climb some stairs and knock on a cabin door and ask for help a young woman came out of a cabin to her parked car. Jessica was a welcome sight – a stranger who was kind and sweet and offered to take me to my lodge. She said, “you could get there from here but it would be a very difficult journey.”

She took me back up to where I had started and then down past the lit up parking lot and around to my lodge. I thanked her, went inside and collapsed on the bed, dizzy from the experience and very thankful I had not run into a bear (I'm sure my clapping helped).

It's funny how we can be so sure we know where we are and where we are going (I had been there before, after all) and yet we can get so disoriented and confused.

And so, we come to Abram who was married to Sarai. Abram was the son of Terah, who was a descendant of Noah. They lived in the land of Ur of the Chaldeans. They were Armenians who then immigrated to Haran, which is in present-day Turkey.

This is a place where people worshipped many gods, but did know the God who would become known as Yahweh – the Lord – the Great I Am.

So, for Abram to hear the voice of Yahweh, and to find himself being obedient to what this God was asking of him, was kind of a miracle. God, for some reason, chose this 75 year old man to become the father of faith.

‘Go!’ God commanded. ‘Go, Abram, from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’

Now, why would Abram do that? He did not know this God, he did not know the name of this God, he had no idea where he was going, or why. Why would he listen to this voice, and pack up his wife – who was no spring chicken – and his brother-in-law, Lot, and his animals and servants and take off walking through the desert wilderness, leaving behind his home, all his relatives, his friends, his country – everything that was familiar to him. To sleep in a tent. A tent was Abrams new home – the first mobile home.

<sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’

That was the promise the Lord made to Abram and he got his 75 year old body up and gathered Sarai and Lot and they began their journey to God- only-knew where.

It just goes to show how powerful a force it can be when God calls you. Yes, you can resist, but God usually will follow you and hound you until you finally can’t resist any longer.

We don’t usually realize it until later, but going where God wants you to go, doing what God tells you to do is far better than anything you could decide to do on your own. It is more interesting, more exciting, more adventurous than we could imagine our lives being.

But what a journey! In that wilderness there were lions and bears and antelope, just to name a few of the wild animals. I wonder if Abram and his little family clapped their way through the desert just in case they met up with a lion, or a bear.

Can’t you just imagine how disoriented they must have felt, wandering around in that wilderness? Just like I felt in the dark that night, trying to decide which road was the right road, surely Abram felt confused at times. Yes, he had God leading him, but still, he had his doubts and fears.

Abram was chosen by God but, just like all the other chosen people in the Bible, he was definitely not perfect. He made plenty of mistakes and bad choices. He tried to take things into his own hands to work out God’s plan on his own.

This fall, we are going to start out like Abram. We are going on an adventure into unknown territory. We are going to explore some of the stories in the Bible.

Now you may be thinking that the Bible isn’t unknown territory for you. You’ve read the Bible and are familiar with the stories.

But the exploration for us is to find how we can learn from those stories about being the Church in a new day, about hearing God's call to leave what is familiar, what we have always known and done, and to see where we are being led.

I want to encourage you – actually, I want to beg you to come to Wednesday night Bible study where you will get much more information about the Scripture and the people we are using as Biblical examples.

We will learn about their culture, their land, their lives – both in our bible study – and in the adult Sunday School class. When I say 'adult,' I actually mean teens through the oldest person. These classes are for everyone and will be fascinating to all.

I want to ask you to stay a little while after this service to join in with our ministry teams in the Fellowship Hall and take the time to look at what each team has set up to show you what they are doing to lead you in ministry and mission. This is about all of you – not just the Session, or the people on the teams.

I would encourage you to sign up for one of the teams while you're in there. To be a team member doesn't mean you and the team do all the work. You and the team do the visioning and the planning and help others to implement the ministry.

Friends, if we aren't all actively involved in the ministry of the church, the church will not be functioning at its highest potential. We are called to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in the community and the world and we do that through all the ministries the teams lead us in.

We don't know what the future of the church looks like but it is obvious that the church is changing. We are called to an adventure – to explore new possibilities. Just like I chose a road and then wasn't sure if it was right – and then it turned out to be the wrong road. But still, with the help of another, I eventually got to my destination. We are not on this road alone. We have help. We have God always guiding us and we have each other.

God is calling us all to get up and set out on a new adventure, to explore and try out new things; to be willing to leave some of the old behind and have fun seeking the new. We pack up our courage, our adventurous spirits, our tents, and most of all – our faith that if God is calling, then God will bless us and get us to the place He wants us to be.

Let's get excited about our Church and about the adventure God is calling us to.

Ready! Set! Let's GO!!!

© Copyright 2018. All Rights Reserved.