

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jun 22nd 2015

Abram was called by God to leave his father's house and the land of his kinsfolk to begin a new life. Through Abram, God established a new land and a new blessing with God's people. As the Lord's people, we now share in that blessing as our inheritance. As I read about Abram's relationship to God, I think about my nephew and his wife who also feel a call to set out to a new place to further God's word and share God's blessings with others. And I am reminded that there are so many ways that people can interpret what the Bible says in this story. My nephew was baptized as a Lutheran and his wife as a Roman Catholic. But when they married at age 19 a year after high school, they joined an Open Bible Church because they felt the people there were more welcoming to them than they were in the Lutheran and Catholic churches where they grew up. They also liked the emphasis on emotional expressions of faith and the strong sense of community their new church family provided for them. A month after their first anniversary they had their first child and within the next seven years, they had four more. The Open Bible Church provided a lot of family support and encouraged them to home school their children. The family grew increasingly closer to their church family and increasingly distant from their natal family and other members of the community.

My nephew and his wife also increasingly felt a strong call to mission. Within the last two years, they solicited funds from friends and relatives to go on month long mission trips with their church group to Romania and Kenya. They left their children with friends from the church and relatives. My nephew had been taking on-line Bible classes with the Open Bible Church and this year he quit his relatively good paying and steady job as a body-shop worker. He and his wife sold their house and announced that they were awaiting a call to be a pastoral team. But it didn't happen. After living for two months in a camper the entire family moved to Arkansas to be nearer to a former pastor and mentor. My nephew got another job working in a body shop, rented a house, and is still awaiting a call – only he has taken the first step. He left the land of his kinsfolk.

Re-read the story of Abram and try to think about it from my nephew's point of view. That is what I am trying to do. My nephew's parents (my brother and his wife) are also trying to understand what happened. All of us have done a lot to help my nephew and his family but we don't practice our faith in the same way that they do. My nephew and his family don't think we will be saved. They feel the need to separate themselves from us in order to collect their inheritance from God.

I have tried to tell this story without judging. Just the facts. I've tried to be fair to everyone. The Gospel lesson today is very helpful to me. I have a good relationship with my nephew even though we see things quite differently. He told me that he wants to take his family to Africa where he can serve as a missionary. I don't think he should do that until after they are grown. He and his wife will still be young and will have a lot of time to see the world. But he wants his children to share in the experience to strengthen their faith.

The Psalmist says that when the Lord looks down from heaven, he sees all mankind as the people he has chosen for his own inheritance. The only way that can work is if the Lord accepts a lot of different kinds of faith. Converting everyone to Christianity won't guarantee that we all think alike or live out our faith alike.

Jesus says we can't be the ones to decide which measure we can use to judge others. The Bible is a large volume of evidence of other people's faith and the way God worked through various individuals. It allows for a lot of different interpretations of what God calls us to do. If to be human means to be flawed in our reasoning and understanding, then it would seem that none of us has got it all right. But I think that Jesus still expects us to seek the truth and even to try to help others see truth more clearly. The way we can begin to do that is through self-examination. I think my nephew and his wife need to be more tolerant and respectful of others. They probably also need to have a more focused plan for their career development. But the only way they will listen to me is if I don't criticize what they feel in their hearts is the right and necessary way to live their lives. They obviously need a lot of love and support as they seek to define their own identities in a larger world. I can try to help them with that.

So, today I pray with all adults who are concerned about the spiritual growth of their children and the life choices they make. I especially pray for those who are suffering because of the choices their children make in the name of God. Even if we are hurting, we need to continue to offer love and guidance as our children grow and mature. If we can keep from judging, maybe we are also growing in this process with them.

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