

“Transitions”

Working our way through life’s unending changes

February 17, 2008

Text: Genesis 12:1-4a, John 3:1-17

I.

If we think about it, our lives are an endless unfolding of transitions? Always—however slow, however sudden—change of some sort is upon us. And that can be a good thing.

Perhaps, that’s the important part of our reading from **Genesis** this morning. Change can be good, particularly when it’s linked to *the promises of God*.

The idea of *change* is always a part of our daily lives. Change is ubiquitous; it’s everywhere. Certainly, it’s a core element in the election fury that is now fully upon us. ***Change we can believe in!*** Change that can take our nation and our communities to a better place.

Change that can responsibly disengage us from Iraq, stimulate and invigorate our staggering economy, heal our wounds and lift high our hopes ... in health care ... in education ... with our environmental concerns ... and on and on.

Election fever, of course, always emphasizes some element of change. Change from what has been ... what hasn’t been working ... what hasn’t born fruit; to the promise and possibilities, the new ideas and new energy that tomorrow brings.

Think what our lives would be like outside of the promises of God. God’s promises always invite us toward some transition, some change, some movement. The *promises of God* are akin to hope. Always, we live with hope. And where would hope be without some change or transition to realize the hope?

Hope that today can be a better day; that it can move us beyond yesterday. Hope that we can all grow towards our best self, towards the best that God has planted in our heart and spirit. Hope that new beginnings are possible ... new understandings are possible ... new reconciliation and peace are possible.

Hope is foundational to our faith. It shines out of *the promises of God* moving us towards a deeper realization of God’s purposes.

II.

Our reading from **Genesis 12** is about a promise—the promise of God to Abraham and Sarah. To put this in context, we need to remember that Abraham and Sarah (Abram and

Sarai, at the time) are barren. They have been unable to have children, a symbol of deep humiliation and shame to both of them.

But now, in a moment of God's undaunting promise, everything is changed. It can happen. Things *can* change.

Go from your country, said God to Abraham, and from your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Whoa! That's a load ... overflowing with transition. And all rooted in the promise of a new beginning on the other side of *barrenness*; a promise of new life and new descendants forever and ever.

Transitions.

But look, there's risk involved. Take Abraham and Sarah; they gotta leave all that is secure and familiar. From Haran, where they had settled, they are sent off to *the promised land of Canaan*.

Have you ever uprooted your family and moved? It can be an exciting time, to be sure; but it can also be a time of anxiety and stress. All the *what ifs* start coming into play. *What if* ... things don't work out ... we can't make it ... *what if* all kinds of things.

Abraham and Sarah are leaving their country, their kindred (family), all of their traditions and memories built up over the years. It wasn't their idea. It was God's idea. Still, there was risk involved. God may have promised it; but still, we have to believe in the promise. Sometimes that's easier said than done.

III.

I uprooted my family two times, not counting when Yvette and I came to Miami Lakes, the best move we've ever made. By then, our girls were on their own.

In 1980, we moved from Palo Alto, CA. to Buffalo, New York, to pastor a small, struggling urban church. Although it worked out, for the most part, in retrospect, I wonder, what was I thinking? For someone who covets warm weather and outdoor sports, not exactly an enlightened plan.

Then, two years later, we really uprooted—moving from Buffalo to San Diego. Only this time, we had no job situation to move to. Talk about risk. However, on this move, things worked out really well for us ... and in ten months we were in a very promising long-term situation in Poway, CA., a blooming suburb of San Diego.

Transitions. Our lives are always in the grip of some sort of transition, aren't they? And how critical is our faith along the way?

Abraham, of course, is lionized for his faith. *The faith of Abraham*, we say; and at every point in his spiritual journey—and it wasn't all easy—he had faith.

Faith that God would somehow see him through. Faith that they would arrive in the land of Canaan. Faith that he and Sarah would, indeed, have children. And of course, soon, Sarah becomes pregnant and their son Isaac was born.

Transitions ... but in a context of faith. It's the faith element that connects us to God and to hope ... and to the courage to push on and make the best of every situation we find ourselves in. God is always nudging us toward some deeper purpose and life-meaning.

IV.

Look at **Nicodemus** in our reading from John 3 that I just shared with us! The story of **Nicodemus** is an unbelievable story. In many ways, it's incredible. **Nicodemus** is a renowned Pharisee. He is a man of considerable means and influence and stature. The Pharisees were like ...

- the lawyers of Judaism.
- They were the interpreters of the Law ...
- the safeguarders of the religious traditions ...
- again, men of considerable stature and prominence within the Jewish community.

And now, **Nicodemus**, a Pharisee, *comes to Jesus by night* bursting with curiosity and wonder. What's going on? Immediately, we get drawn in.

Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.

Jumping right in, Jesus starts talking to him about the kingdom of God and the fruits of the spirit and on and on ...

While this is all new to **Nicodemus**, an important point in all of this is what's going on with **Nicodemus** as a person. Something is happening in his spirit. A new hunger, prompted, perhaps, by a lingering curiosity, has been born in his spirit.

Again, he comes to Jesus *by night*, the Bible says. Isn't that curious? Again, what's going on? Clearly, **Nicodemus** has come to an awareness in his life that something's missing. Something is lacking. **Nicodemus** is in the throes of some sort of *spiritual transition*.

We don't know how old he is ... or anything about his family circumstances. We only know that something is going on in his spirit. Certainly, he's curious about the way he has seen God revealed in and through Jesus.

The point is—again—he has come ... he has come to see Jesus. He wants something. He's looking for something.

1. A closer walk with God ...
2. reassurance that he's on the right path in his life.
3. Perhaps he wants a more meaningful life.
4. ... or to find a way to fill some nagging emptiness within ...

And then he sees Jesus, and hears about him and all the great things he's done.

- He's heard about the love ... and the forgiveness ...
- and he's seen the way other people respond to Jesus.
- Perhaps he sees, now, the chance to re-prioritize his life choices ...
- ... reaffirm his life-commitments.
- Get himself on track ...

V.

Transitions. These are common stages of growth and evolution that we all go through; at any age ... at any juncture along the way.

Isn't it the case that we're all working our way through something ... some transition? What's important to remember in all of this is that ...

1. We're not alone ... the Spirit is in us and around us to guide us...
2. No matter who we are or where we are in our life-journey, God has a vision for us, something in store for us. A place or reality to which we can aspire ... where our gifts and the truth and beauty that throb in our spirit can come alive.
3. Remember ... it's a process. Life is a process. No matter how we may have grown accustomed to think about our lives, our lives are not static.
4. We don't have to have it all figured out today. Sometimes the best thing we can do today is be patient ... do everything we can to allow love and hope to shine through our spirit and be patient. Sometimes our lives need time.

Abraham and Sarah will need time to adjust to their new surrounding in the land of Canaan. It won't all happen at once. Early on, they're still barren. Soon, of course, Sarah, beyond anything they could have imagined, save the promise of God, becomes pregnant with Isaac.

Sometimes, we need time. Our lives need time. Time for things to sort out ... fall in place. Time for healing, renewal, whatever it is.

And sometimes, as well, as with **Nicodemus**, we need the courage and conviction to act on impulses—intuition, perhaps—that is alive in our spirit. We may not totally understand it or be able to talk about it, but we know it. There are times when we need to take risks and be pro-active ... making *good choices* again and again.

VI.

Transitions knocking at our door ... nudging us, inviting us ... to move forward, to go deeper ...

But, all in the context of faith. Faith that the hand of God is indeed upon us. Faith that when we practice *the presence of God* everyday—in our prayer life ... in our meditation and reflection ... in the way we treat people ... particularly those whom we most love—that God will work things out.

The KEY, friends, is to keep after it ... with the BIG PICTURE of our lives in mind, faith in our spirit ... and love in our hearts.

*I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come, said the Psalmist.
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

When we give ourselves to God, we give ourselves to the life-process ... to the movement, the **transition** that today brings ... and we do so with hope and expectation.

For God so loved the world that God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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