

It was an ordinary, hot day, as most days were in the old man's life. He, his wife and their household have traveled many miles over many years. Like him, she is now in her senior adult years. She knows more about him and all their struggles than she would dare mention to her closest friend. There is one troubling, gnawing, painful emptiness in their lives that they no longer mention. They are childless; living in a culture that prizes children, fertility and family above all virtues. His name is Abram; her Sarai.

One ordinary, dusty, hot day, as most days were in the old man's life, he hears a voice unlike any other he has heard before. This is not the sound of the wind bouncing off distant rocks, or the echo of sheep lost in a nearby canyon. No, this voice is punctuated with Otherness, speaking to him from a place so distant and yet so near that it pummels his mind with awe. Crazy though it seems, the voice says, "Abram, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 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. In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Then the voice goes away, and the air is now filled again with the winds of the desert.

"So," as we heard, "Abram went, as the Lord had told him" and all history changed because this old man had the courage to listen. Abram will get a new name Abraham, the beloved patriarch of the Hebrew faith; Sarai becomes Sarah, the mother of the faithful. And through their lives, the life of their son Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and their sons and wives and all who came after them, blessings come to the whole world, ultimately in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, son of Abraham, son of David, son of Mary, Son of God.

Come forward now 2,000 years. The Gospel of Matthew tells the story of another ordinary, dusty day when Jesus invited Peter, James, and John to ascend a mountain. On that mountain, Matthew tells us our Lord was transfigured, changed into dazzling white in the presence of these three men. And there appeared with him Moses the great lawgiver and Elijah the legendary prophet.

Seeing such dazzling wonder, Peter quickly suggest that they build three shrines; one for Jesus, one for Moses, one for Elijah. But then the voice spoke. Just as crazy as that voice that spoke to Abram centuries earlier, this voice addressed the disciples: “This is my beloved Son; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” That was it. As suddenly as the voice spoke, it stopped, leaving our Lord and his friends alone on that wind-swept mountain.

Again we hear the name, the identity of Jesus, spoken; “This is my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” And instead of staying in three makeshift tents, they set off down the mountain toward the day when there will be three crosses; one holding the nail-pierced flesh of their beloved Teacher, God’s beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two stories; two moments in time separated by centuries, but divided only by a comma in the sweeping story of God’s love. What are these two stories telling us about God? What are they telling us about who we are? What God is calling us to be and become in this holy season of Lent?

For one thing, they are telling us that God breaks through the ordinary moments of life in extraordinary ways. The birth of a child, the changing of your major, a clean bill of health, the untimely loss of a loved one, brushing your teeth, taking a coffee break with a friend, are all events that populate ordinary days in the lives of ordinary people. When these things and hundreds of other such moments of everyday living happen, what if God’s voice is speaking your name? To do . . . what? To become . . . who? I don’t know, but if you have the courage to listen, God may well speak in the sipping of coffee or through the blaring of the alarm clock.

But something else, something even more compelling is peeking around the comma in this story. That something else is the resolve seen in old Abram and in the conviction of Peter, James, and John. The writer of Genesis noted, “So Abram went . . .”; Matthew notes that the three apostles fell to the ground, only to be raised by our Lord who told them, “Don’t be afraid!” Meaning what? Meaning that when we hear God’s voice, our response is not so much to marvel at **what** we hear as it is to **act on what we hear**. Abram and Sarai left their family to follow the call. The disciples left their nets, their friends, their families to follow Jesus. The courage to listen is cowardice without the courage to act on what we hear.

What is God saying to you in these first weeks of Lent? God is calling us by name to become daring, uncommon followers of Jesus Christ. To follow him through these Lenten days is to follow the One who goes before us, inviting us to be a people known more for our loving action than our loving thoughts; our caring ways more than our caring ideas. The courage to listen is simply the courage to live in the light and love of this One who gave his life that we might live now and always and live to the fullest.

Some may think you are crazy; others will want dazzling proof. But for those who hear, all that is required is simple faith transfigured into daring, acts of mercy and grace, generously given to others in name of Jesus. May we listen and act in this holy season of Lent.

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