

Gospel Lesson**Matthew 9:9-13****Sermon****Where are We Going?****Tommy Carrico**

The Lord said to Abram “Go from your country, and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so you will be a blessing. 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. So Abram went.” What? I don’t mean any disrespect, but come on Abram! Try to rationalize this – God tells you to leave everything you know and love, to watch the comfort of your family’s home and land fade into the distance as you go...somewhere. So you packed up all your stuff, your family, and go, and hope that by doing so, God would make your name great and everyone would be blessed because of you...but what’s next? You can’t just wander off aimlessly hoping that maybe, eventually, the good Lord will bless you with a destination and the fulfillment of a great purpose. Greatness takes precise, long-term vision and a detailed, organized plan to get from here to there. What else? You finally got somewhere and God told you that he would give all the land you see to your offspring? How can you trust that this land, that all God has shown you is going to live on after you, or that those who come after you are going to take care of it? You can’t devote your entire life to a promise that you won’t ever see fulfilled...can you?

And in the New testament reading, Jesus tells Matthew to get up from his tax booth, his place of business – where he earned the money that kept him sheltered and fed, and he just get up and followed – who is going to carry his work? He didn’t think that maybe it would be prudent to ask Jesus why? Why should I get up and go with you? Oh, and by the way, where are we going? Where am I following you to? No, no, no, no need for all of these questions, Jesus called, so Matthew just went.

I’m glad that Abraham trusted God, and followed God – but it still doesn’t make sense. I’m glad that Abraham and Matthew can both follow along in faith, hoping that they are fulfilling God’s plan...but what was God calling them to? He called Matthew the tax collector to...dinner...I guess...but what else, there has to be something more, right? God called Abram to go somewhere...but where? And why them? Why are they being called? Paul tells us that God did not promise that Abraham or his descendants would inherit the world because they obeyed the law, but because they had faith. Paul also says that God’s promise will rest on grace and be guaranteed to all of Abraham’s descendants despite some glaring obstacles. Abraham was old – at least according to Paul. Paul tells us though that Abraham’s age didn’t faze him – “he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body.” Abraham also did not weaken in faith “when he considered the barrenness of [his wife] Sarah’s Womb.” As a matter of fact, “no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God but he grew strong in his faith As He Gave Glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what God promised.”

God makes promises. God has a vision. There is some greater good being accomplished as we meander along in this life. God gracefully allows us to be a part of

the coming kingdom by the power of the Holy Spirit. I wish I knew what that looked like. I wish I knew with certainty that I would see the kingdom come, that I could I could always have complete faith in where the Spirit is leading me, and that whatever higher purpose God is intending would be explicitly revealed: I wish that the reason we are all here and what we are all working toward could be known, so it could be planned for right here and right now. Unfortunately for me, God's plans unfold over many lifetimes – and those who are used by God always seem to leave us mid-journey. Not to mention that God's promises are usually vague and the work of the Spirit is difficult to discern.

So, naturally, I have doubts, I stop and question. I'm supposed to do what? I'm supposed to follow who? Well...then what? [pause] I said, then what? I want to know what's next, where am I going, what am I doing, what is the end goal of all this. God told Abram, God tells me, and I bet God tells us: "Go to the land that I will show you." But I can't just turn everything upside down to follow a plan that I may not see fulfilled, and that I don't know where it's leading without having all of, or at least most of, the answers first. Can I really join the work of the spirit hoping that I will get some answers someday? With Abraham, and probably with Matthew the tax collector, it isn't that they followed God without hesitation or asking questions, but Paul tells us that Abraham grew strong in his faith while he was giving glory to God. He wasn't called because he knew all the right information or the right people, or had all the answers, or did all the right things, but he had faith, he trusted that he would arrive at the land that God would show him, and God's promise would eventually be fulfilled. This trust, this faith, I am convinced is not blind – questions should be asked, plans should be made, and a vision should be articulated and refined. There is a middle ground though between asking no questions and only asking questions. Our faith is something that we are simultaneously reflecting upon and practicing. While living out our faith, we do reflect, we do ask questions, and we do learn while we are being led – and God does give us answers, but not necessarily immediately after we ask our questions.

Abraham did not have all the answers when he set off from the land of his kindred and the house of his father, but he went, and he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. His story is one that is full of questioning, of doubting, of taking matters into his own hands – at one point, he even laughs in God's face at the absurdity of God's promise. But he acted. He didn't stop, refusing to follow God until he got some answers, but he also didn't run off blindly following a call that made no sense. In a similar manner, Matthew the tax collector didn't stop, but followed. In chapter ten, Jesus calls his disciples – among them, "Matthew the tax collector." The disciples were a group that asked Jesus questions, sought clarification, wanted things to make sense, they typically didn't fully understand what was going on, but they followed, they trusted, they had faith. And now, so do we.

During my extended tenure as Pastoral Intern of Rehoboth Presbyterian Church – today is my one week anniversary – I have realized that this summer is shaping up to be one of asking questions, seeking clarification, all while following Christ, and I feel

privileged to be called to be a part of it. I am excited to join you all in following the command to Go where God will lead us, despite not knowing with certainty where we are being led, and despite knowing that there are promises God will make and that God will keep that we will not necessarily see fulfilled this summer, next summer, or the one after that. I am blessed to be joining a community who has heard Jesus say "Follow me," and who got up and are following him. We may not necessarily feel ready, or prepared, or sinless, or fully equipped for what we are called to do, but God calls us out of unmerited love to follow, to ask questions and seek discernment, as we participate in the work of the Holy Spirit, because we have hope in God' promises, and we trust that we, too, will be made strong in our faith, as we Glorify God. Amen.