



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
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A Stephen Ministry Congregation
www.goodshepherdwi.org

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 23, 2018

“Without a Map”

(Hebrews 11:8-9)

Rev. David K. Groth

Sept. 23, 2018 Installation of Rev. Mike Schempf as a
Missionary to Uganda

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to place that he was to receive an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise. . .” (Hebrews 11:8-9).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: O God, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, grant us humility and childlike faith that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Abraham and Sarah are getting along in years. They are nomads, living in tents and always on the move in search of water and pastures for their livestock. The Lord has been generous to them; they are wealthy. And they are elderly, so my guess is they're thinking about building a home somewhere, the ultimate goal of most elderly nomads, where they can settle down into a long, contented retirement. But then a mysterious voice comes to Abraham with a mandate: "Leave." "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1).

Remarkable! After all those years of migrating like geese, Abraham and Sarah are finally in the position to make a graceful exit from itinerant life; finally in the position to sell their flocks and herds and that musty tent and build a real home with foundations and walls and a sturdy roof and a wood-burning stove rather than a campfire. But now the voice of God is telling them to get up and go, to strike out on a new and risky adventure. "Leave your country, your people, your household and go to the land I will show you."

Verse four, "So Abraham left." Just three words! It makes it sound so simple and easy, but it wasn't. These are real people, flesh and blood people, people feeling the same things you would feel if the Lord told you to pick up and move to the land of Canaan. Abraham and Sarah are feeling what *these* two (Mike and Karen) are feeling right now, having been called to get up and go to Uganda.

Uganda is a long ways away, a long ways away from their aging parents, and the desire to care for them. Uganda is a long ways away from their children and grandchildren. Uganda is a long ways away from top shelf medical care, and dependable infrastructure and security. Uganda is a long ways away from their support network, their siblings and friends and colleagues. Uganda

is a long ways away from their home on Louisa Street where they raised their children and built many memories there. And what of all that stuff there, stuff they purchased at yard sales with youth groups and confirmation classes in mind?

Some of you don't know this about Mike and Karen, but they could outfit a small military unit with figure skates, and old bikes and board games. The market value of all your stuff has just plummeted because all their stuff just hit the market. Figure skates in town are selling for pennies on the dollar!

Moving away from the familiar, and the predictable and comfortable, to the unfamiliar and unpredictable, moving away from the people you know and love . . . what else can explain it? What else can explain it other than the voice of God saying to you what it said to Abraham, "Now leave. Leave your country, your people, your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

Let no one underestimate the difficulty of submitting to this call of God, and the trust and courage it requires.

Then, on top if it all, you have to raise your own funds to support this mission. At least Abraham and Sarah had large flocks they could sell. You have figure skates. Clearly, you're going to need help and generosity from us, from God's people here to make this happen. With that in mind, I'd like to remind the rest of you of that insert in your bulletin, and ask that you not file it or forget about it, but fill it out, for the sake of the kingdom of God, and support this mission work of Mike and Karen in Uganda.

You know, there was a time when the synod would underwrite the work of missionaries. The missionaries just needed to show up educated, packed and ready to go. That old model doesn't work anymore. The missionaries themselves must raise the funds that will support them while in the mission field.

One of the reasons why the old model no longer works is because people today don't like giving on blind trust to big institutions. They want to know more specifically where their money is going, how it's being used,

and whom it's supporting.

People of God, we know these two! We know where they are going and what they'll be doing. We know their faith, their energy, their Christian love and concern. And they've already proven their frugality and generosity and stewardship. We know these two and therefore, in a way, we are without excuse. If we don't want to give directly to synod because it's so large and impersonal, then we must at least be willing to support these two whom we know and love and trust.

Abraham was 75 when God told him to get up and go, and Sarah older still. As we age, just about everything becomes a little more difficult, right? What used to be routine and customary becomes an adventure in itself. Mike and Karen, you're not 75 like Abraham, but you're no spring chickens either. I know you can feel it in your bones: those little preachers of God's Law. And I suspect you also wonder whether you're up to the tasks and challenges ahead. But the One who has called you to this mission field has equipped you for the same, if not with the skills already at hand, then at least with the ability and flexibility to learn on the fly.

And I know throughout Scripture, God makes his power known through weakness. 1 Corinthians 1:27, "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God . . . Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

"So Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going". Hebrews 11 celebrates this faith. Today, we are commending you for doing the same, but also resolving to support you in this venture with our prayers and financial support.

But this text is also a challenge to the rest of us. Sometimes, to be faithful to God, you have to leave all that is certain and safe and stable and secure and entrust your future

into God's hands. Big decisions like that require a certain spirit, a willingness to throw the dice and watch them roll. That's gambling, of course, not faith or decision making, but big decisions *always* feel like a gamble. It's what Mike and Karen are doing. It's what many of our ancestors did, 160, 170 years ago. They left that which was certain and safe and stable and secure, many of them because they could no longer practice the Christian faith in truth and sincerity. I venture to say many of your ancestors came over with not much more than strong backs, a family Bible, and a firm confidence that God would take care of them in this new wilderness called Wisconsin.

It's what this church did 47 years ago when you left what was familiar and somewhat guaranteed, and set out on an adventure to form a new church.

It's what this church did 18 years ago when it started a Christian day school.

The big decisions always feel like a gamble, but sometimes to be faithful means giving up the familiar and easy and comfortable and predictable, and going where God is calling you to go. Often this does not mean moving physically. It may mean, however, leaving a relationship that you know is not God-pleasing. It may mean checking into a treatment facility for addictions. It surely means having the baby, though unexpected. It may mean taking on primary care of your grandchildren. It may mean giving up a lucrative and stable job to be true to what you know God is calling you to do. And for one or two of you, it may mean, packing up and moving to the seminary.

God said to Abraham "leave!" The most unfaithful thing Abraham could have done at that point is dig in his heels. Sometimes for us the most unfaithful thing to do is to do nothing, change nothing, venture nothing, risk nothing.

Our text says "Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going." It all makes me think of that beautiful collect in the liturgy of Evening Prayer. "Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils

unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ” (Collect for *Evening Prayer*, HS98 p. 22).

His hand will be leading you, and his love will be supporting you. I’m thinking now about our psalm, Psalm 139: “Where can I go from your Spirit?” the psalmist asks. “If I go up to the heavens (if only in a Boeing 787), you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea (as in Uganda), even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

He knows your anxieties, your fears. “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You are familiar with all my ways.” If the Lord bothers to know so much about us, it must mean he loves us and cares about the big and little things of our lives.

Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely.” How comforting is that, especially for preachers and teachers? If the Lord knows what we’re *about* to say, then he can also edit it and scrub it clean, make it right, and even inspire it.

“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.” There’s no place so remote that it’s outside the Lord’s jurisdiction. Uganda is just as much the Lord’s neighborhood as Watertown.

My guess is at some point you will feel isolated and alone, but feelings can betray the truth. “If I make my bed in the depths, you are there.” The one who descended into hell to proclaim the victory over sin, death and the devil is not afraid to accompany you wherever you go to proclaim that same victory.

We have a God who knows us and loves us and pursues us, all the way to the cross, in order to redeem and save us. You are his baptized people, and he, for one, will never forget it.

Mike and Karen, the venture ahead is full of mystery to you, but nothing is hidden from God, and he's the one sending you. He'll be there waiting for you as you deplane. He's the one who will walk with you every step of the way. He's the one who will fill your mouths with good things to eat, good things to say. And he's the one who will ultimately bring you home, maybe not to Watertown, but to the city of God, where he is.

“By faith Abraham, when called to go . . . obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country.” Thanks be to God. Amen.

