

**Genesis 12: 1-4a**

**Psalm 121**

**Romans 4: 1-5, 13-17**

**John 3:1-17**

*These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word*

Some good news and bad news – we’re going to be short-changed in the sermon....

The good news, the sermon is only about 5 lines long.... The bad news.. that’s 5 lines of text being explored rather than the length of the sermon....

A first glance at the short OT suggested that there is not much in it... It really doesn’t tell much of the Abram/Abraham story; however the short simplicity of the text enables us to look more critically at its overall context, a chance to see the overview rather than get caught up in the details of some more complex narrative.

Abram is told (by God) to go; he is told “*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*”.

If we follow the story that begins here as an historical narrative we will see that Abram, in following this Divine command, invaded another country, committed genocide, took multiple wives in order to establish his lineage and gave birth to the nation of Israel; which is the most armed(militarised)\* nation on earth, and it alone claims an identity as God’s chosen people.

This reading of the Abraham story is one faith’s view of their place in the world; similar stories exist in many faiths and in almost every culture; and they can very much serve to give people a cohesive sense of identity and belonging.

This story from the Hebrew tradition was incorporated into the ‘canon of Scriptures by the early Christian Church, and that new context enabled it to be read in a new and broader context.

Much of the reasoning for its inclusion was associated with maintaining continuity, and authority, acknowledging that the new faith of Christianity was a movement from and beyond that of the Hebrew tradition. Christ was of the Hebrew tradition but revealed a ‘New Creation’ that didn’t wipe out the past tradition, but rather went beyond it.

Sacred texts, and other literary forms, offer an infinite number of readings depending on context, time and the place and position of the reader.

It is worthwhile pausing to fully appreciate that texts can have more than one reading and can be applied to, and inform, different contextual situations.

By way of simple illustration; “**The Tortoise and the Hare**” is one of Aesop's Fables; the story concerns a Hare who ridicules a slow-moving Tortoise and is challenged by the tortoise to a race. The hare soon leaves the tortoise behind and, confident of winning, takes a nap midway through the course. When the Hare awakes however, he finds that his competitor, crawling slowly but steadily, has arrived before him.

Is it a tale of ‘more haste less speed’, or is it a tale of wisdom overcoming physical prowess; or is it a tale of both and more?

How does the story apply when we assign to the tortoise the slowly increasing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions associated with climate change; and to the hare the capacity we have to win the race and overcome climate change?

The same story provides different insights depending on the context and the perspective of the reader.

So let’s go back to the short narrative from Genesis in the first reading; knowing that we don’t have to read the text today as it was first read and/or written.; rather we listen for its universal insight that speaks to us here today.

We have in the text a cameo of encounter ; the Divine giving voice and direction to humanity.

It illuminates an amazingly simple first step in our Lenten movement, and our journey into the bigger story, into Easter.

*“Now 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. 2 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.”*

Go from your country, your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you; that is quite an ask!

The fear of change, of movement and of leaving and loss; the fear of going alone into the unknown; these fears will already be working overtime to switch us off from truly hearing this Divine word of enlightenment. But let’s try and stay with the text.

*“Go from your country”* invites us into a universal worldview, it asks that we let go of our nationalistic prejudice; it asks us to break open our fear created barriers of ‘border protection’ and embrace ourselves and all ‘others’ as one; not Israel, nor Australia, but all, *“a great nation”*.

*“Go from your kindred”* invites us to reach beyond the clan-like selfishness of our family and to recognise that our place in our family is a place of birth, teaching, love and nurturing. Our family is a place from which we go out into the world and become creative of the same for others, here we are asked to recognise that every child is our child, and every parent is our parent. We are not asked to stay at home and be responsible for our family, rather we are shown to be responsible for all families, we birth *“a great nation”* and see all as one family. Not Humphris’, nor Australians, but *“all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

*“Go from your father’s house”* invites us beyond the lineage of our birth into our place as part of a common humanity. When at our death we are returned to the soil, very few will return what they have into the hands of humanity, for in our culture we seek to keep things ‘in the family’, we accumulate wealth for ourselves. That has resulted in the “85 richest people [in the world being] as wealthy as poorest half of the world”.\*\*

To go from our father’s house takes us away from our primal belonging and enables us to see ourselves, with every other, as children of the one heavenly father.

And so where shall we go?

*“Go... 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.... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

When we *“Go from our country and our kindred and our father's house”* we go into the wilderness and as in Lent we go through the wilderness into *“the land that I will show you”*; We move out into the garden that opens before us as the stone is rolled away on Easter morning, we go into the Garden of resurrection, and into ‘A New Creation’...

Some of us will need to be guided on this journey, and they shall find guides, for it is the only journey that takes us into tomorrow.

Others will not take the journey at all, keeping their investment in death fearfully in their hands...

Was Abram, special because he made the journey?

No, this is not his story, in our hearing, this is our story, it is a simple first step that leads us into eternity, into life’s fullest living; and it is for each and every one of us, as underlined in the gospel:

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

**\*WASHINGTON, Nov 14 2012 (IPS)** - Israel tops the list of the world’s most militarised nations, according to the latest Global Militarisation Index released Tuesday by the Bonn International Centre for Conversion (BICC).

\*\* Oxfam report quoted in the Guardian newspaper

<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jan/20/oxfam-85-richest-people-half-of-the-world>