

## **“Part & Parcel”**

*Highlighting East Union's Grow, Proclaim, Serve – Children's Sunday School*

Genesis 1:1-2a, 12:1-9 & Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29

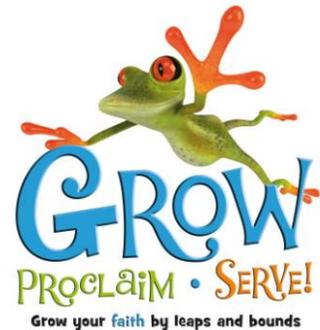
Rev. James Ramsey ~ October 12, 2014



My sermon this morning is titled “Part & Parcel.” It’s about you and your place in God’s future! It’s about us and how we fit into God’s plans!

Christian education thrives here at East Union in a variety of forms. I have previously highlighted our new Women’s Circles, and their focus on a book titled “Saying YES to God.” I lifted up our adult Seekers’ Class and their focus on peacemaking this season. And I presented our Men’s Bible Study and their current emphasis on Genesis – especially what we could learn from the Joseph narrative.

Today we celebrate our youngest children – those aged 3-5<sup>th</sup> Grade...what we call “The GROW class,” since their curriculum is titled Grow-Proclaim-Serve. Vonna Miller coordinates the class and teaches it often, although there are almost always two teachers on a Sunday. The aim of this class is to cover the Bible over a three-year period. We currently find ourselves at the beginning of that three-year cycle, so the children began in Genesis this fall. They’re studying the same biblical stories as our Men’s Bible Study!



The children meet from 9:30 – 10:30 every Sunday in the combined classroom below the sanctuary. The class averages 10-12 children. They arrive, post their attendance stickers, pray over their offering and start out with a big group activity. The Bible story is always the center piece – either read dramatically by the older children, or acted out by the whole class as the teacher reads. The large group then splits into younger and older to engage the material in a way appropriate to age. The group comes back together for a final activity.

The children are encouraged to bring their own Bibles and they use them in class. I like that they are not sitting down and doing worksheets all the time, but active and engaged in the material. Vonna and the other teachers are continually amazed at how well the kids read – and how eager they are to learn the biblical story for themselves!

One common theme emphasized in the class is this idea of trusting God – no matter what, no matter what you are doing or where you find yourself.

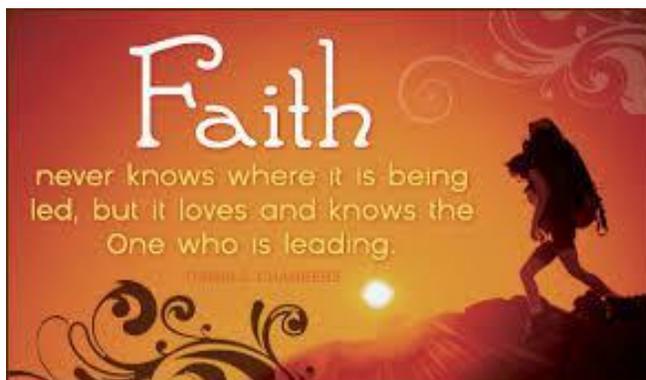
We see this clearly when Abram and Sarah receive the call from God to pick up and move to a destination yet to be identified. They had to trust God, because they had no idea where they were going.

We are introduced to Abram and Sarai when we learn that they are living with Abram's father and Sarai is unable to have children. This situation figures to change drastically when God unexpectedly addresses Abram,



*Leave your land, your family, and your father's house and go to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.*

Sounds great! Almost too good to be true! Such a promise seems unlikely to be fulfilled – even if it does come from The LORD. Abram and Sarai are old, very old – well beyond child-bearing years. Yet the promise implies many offspring.



Abraham and his descendents are chosen by God for a great future. But why? What makes Abraham so special? Why would he and his family and his descendants be part & parcel of God's plans for the world?

The answer becomes clearer when we examine Abraham's response to God – his response is quick and decisive. God says "Go." And Abraham goes. What stands out about Abraham is his faithfulness...his willingness to put his trust in God, regardless of an uncertain future – a lack of explanation about how God's promise

could possibly be fulfilled. Abraham accepts God's word and is willing to follow God wherever necessary. Reading through Genesis, and all of scripture, we discover that God is consistently faithful.

We, too, are part of God's people. We, too, are part & parcel of God's plan for the world. We, too, are called by God to be faithful, each in his or her own way. We are invited to trust God...no matter what, no matter what we are doing or where we find ourselves.



Imagine the upheaval in Abraham and Sarah's home. I know the hassle it is to get ready to move, packing everything away, deciding on a few essentials that you will keep handy, cleaning up the old property, anticipating the new, saying good-bye to neighbors, deciding to leave some things

behind, you know, those things you haven't used in 5 years that are in the corner of your basement or the back of your closet or the bottom of your drawer or underneath your bed!

Today we would hire a moving company...or at least a gullible neighbor and a U-Haul! But Abraham and Sarah had no moving company, and no truck would pull up to help them, they probably had to secure camels to do the job.



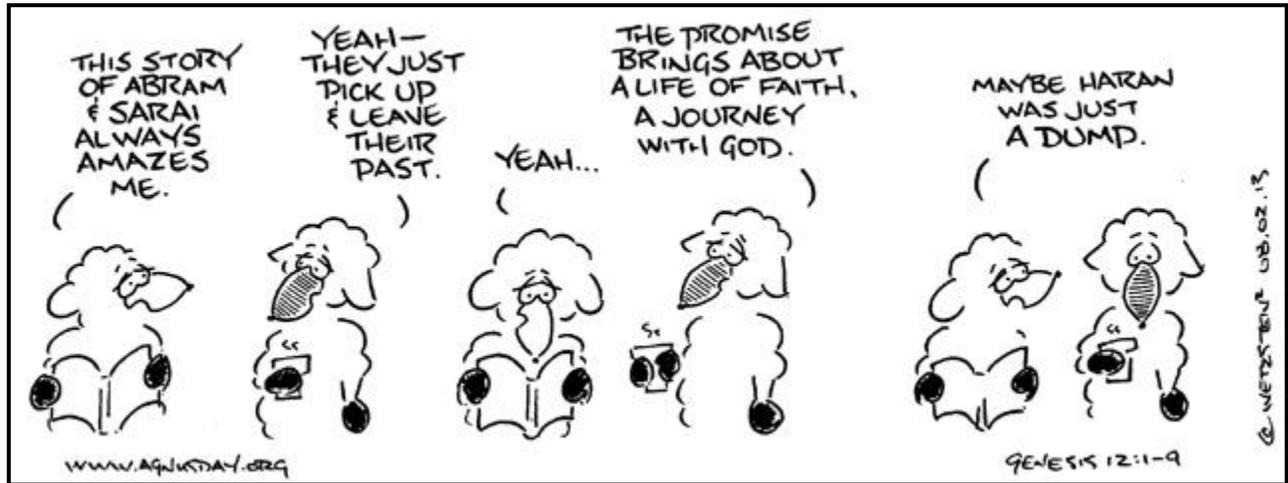
When our children imagined this move -- they took some time to be those camels, getting ready to take off across the desert, headed west.



The children got down on their hands and knees and each one received a makeshift saddle bag slung across their back, symbolizing Abraham and Sarah's belongings. They started off down the hall carrying their load all over the downstairs of the church. And as they strolled they sang this song (to the tune of "Are You Sleeping?"):

"God called Abraham, God called Abraham  
Go this way, Go this way  
To a land I show you, To a land I show you  
Go today, Go today."

Do you know the Agnus Day Cartoon strip? Two sheep are discussing the Bible and things of faith?



The first sheep, an open Bible in her lap, comments "The story of Abram & Sarah always amazes me." The second sheep, holding a hot beverage quips, "Yeah, they just pick up and leave their past."

"Yeah..." says the first sheep.

"The promise brings about a life of faith, a journey with God" points out the second sheep.

But then the first sheep reflects, "OF COURSE, maybe Haran was just a dump!"



Yet Abraham and Sarah had no plans to leave their home in Haran – whether it was a dump or not. They didn't set off on a journey through the sand for fun, or for their own change of scenery. They left because God called them to go. They didn't know where they were going, only that God was sending them, leading them, blessing them.

You don't need to know where you are going, you need only know who has planned the trip!

We hold on to this belief as a church...this sense that God leads us, even as we seek to be relevant in a changing world. This is a big week for East Union's leaders. Wednesday night the Trustees and Elders will meet to look at a first draft of the 2015 church budget. Saturday will be an all day retreat for the elders and Strategic Planning Team, as we seek to discern, from all the information we have gathered these past nine months, what priorities God might be showing us.



Martin Luther King once described faith as "taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase."

Life often seems a long set of stairs. Did you ever feel like – I never imagined life like this? Do you ever wish things could just be easier – that the steps might be a little less steep – that the staircase might be a little shorter – or at least have a few more landings?

Sometimes you have to slow down and take one step at a time.

Sometimes you have to get down off your camel and walk a spell yourself. Weariness and doubt are a part of the faith journey, just as they are part of any real journey.



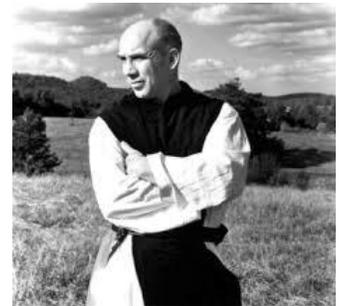
Yet, the entire story of the Bible reminds you and me that we are part & parcel of what God is doing in the world. In the very beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, and everything that is, including us human beings, especially us...God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Abraham and Sarah remind us that God chooses to bless others through us.

We, now, are in Christ Jesus – we are children of God through faith. Because we belong to Christ – we are Abraham's offspring – heirs according to God's promise.

Important for us to remember that when we have lost our bearings. When we look back and sigh, saying to ourselves “I never imagined I would end up here.” Important for us to remember that we are heirs to the promise, when we feel like we are failing.

One of my spiritual heroes is Thomas Merton. He was a regular guy who dedicated his life to living for God. He became a Cistercian monk but never forgot the real world and wrote tirelessly about how to have an authentic faith. His most famous prayer is one Abraham and Sarah could have prayed before they left Haran. It's also a prayer I have prayed many times. I'll end my sermon with it. It's a reconnecting prayer – a prayer that reminds us we are part & parcel of God's plans for the future.



# Prayer of Trust

My Lord God

I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
Nor do I really know myself.  
And the fact that I think that I am following  
your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
does in fact please you.  
And I hope I have the desire in all that I am doing.  
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.  
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the  
right road though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always though I may  
seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear for you are ever with me and  
you will never leave me to face my troubles alone.

Thomas Merton