“Following: Trusting Enough to Move”

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

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A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Lent II, March 1, 2015, dedicated to Neela and Ashlesha Onawales as they come to us from our mission partners, Deep Griha in Pune, India, to Tom Luff for his dedication and love through 3 ¾ years of service as our Building Manager and always to the glory of God!

“Following: Trusting Enough to Move”

Let us pray: may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

Following God is a tall order – just ask Abraham and Jesus. First, Abram whose name is changed by God into today’s text to “Abraham” once he starts following God…

“Father Abraham,” the father of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is the first person named in the 20th generation of human beings. He is not spoken of as one who is righteous or even particularly special. By the time we meet him he is
99 years old. He seems unsure. He makes mistakes. In a Genesis text which is absorbed by and focused on creation, Abram is not able to create. His story is dominated by childlessness. It is almost as if he is so unlike the Creator, that this makes him special. He is utterly human! As such, he is completely in need of God (reference: Abraham by Bruce Feiler)!

While many in the human race, especially in our generation, strive to be Godlike, powerful, and in control, in so doing, they lack what Abram possesses. They lack absolute humanness. Jewish German poet and Nobel Prize winner, Nell Sachs viewed Abraham as a representative human being, looking out at a decimated landscape, peering beyond the flames, aching for just a piece of the divine. She writes of Abram speaking with God, "You have called me, Abram. And I long so much for you" (Ibid, p. 25).

By the 20th Generation of humans, God certainly needs one such as this – one who is so fully human, yet one who longs so much for the divine. As much as we are like Abraham – so human, and yet so longing for the divine – we too will find our rest in God.

Beyond his absolute humanness, two things set Abraham apart. First, he worships God as One! He is the
first monotheist. Second, when God calls, he answers. God says “MOVE” and he gets up and goes. God chooses Abraham but Abraham also chooses to follow God. In essence, God chooses this man and throws an olive branch to all generations. God is saying, "If you put your life in my hands, if you follow me, you will be rewarded."

He gets up and moves, completely trusting in God. He goes forth completely submitting himself to God. He does this through what he does best. He sets off walking. But, this time, he walks with God. He leaves these footprints for us to follow. First, he doesn't believe in God! He BELIEVES God. He doesn't ask for proof. He provides the proof. He moves! He follows.

Jesus follows too. He gives his life to God. He lays down his life for GOD and for his friends. Moreover, in Mark 8, as well as in Matthew, Luke and John, Jesus uses one word for “following” 26 out of the 30 times he calls others to follow him. That word is “Akoloutheo” (ak-ol-oo-theb-o) which can be best translated, “walk with me in the same way I am going,” or “accompany” me.

I feel this translation changes the way we hear how we follow Jesus. It is more a hand offered to a friend to come
with; to walk beside, to be with or to travel alongside. Have you ever had something you discovered that is beautiful, priceless and a wonderment to the eyes and spirit? Have you found a form of prayer; a flower blooming in the early spring, or a flower in barren places that you wanted to show a loved one? Have you discovered new meaning in life? New beauty? New joy? All you wanted to do was show it to someone and share it with someone? “Come, accompany me!” “Come and discover this with me!”

Have you had your child take your hand and pull you to see a new exhibition at the Zoo; a new puppy at Pet Land (watch out for that one!), a newborn pony or lamb or baby? “Come, mommy!” “Come, daddy?”

This is the spirit of the Christ at work in this phrase and in our lives. He says, “come and take my hand… come and walk with me… come on this journey of love and discovery.” Come on… you will love it, too!

But, too often we pull back. We hold off. We mistrust or distrust the source of wonderment. It can’t be that good. It can’t be that beautiful. So, we dig in our heals and stay where we are.
On the wall of her counseling office, one of my friends has the word, “MOVE.” It is strategically placed for those who are sitting on the couch and contemplating their lives—or perhaps complaining about everybody else. It is a simple wooden carving of one word—“Move.” We would all do well to follow such an admonition.

Are you wallowing in self-pity? Move. Are you wondering how do you apologize or self-correct something you have done that needs correcting or resetting? Move. Are you struggling to sort out the present or the future? Move.

When you move, I recommend you move with Jesus, that you accompany Jesus on the steps of discovery and the journey of faith. He is a great travelling partner. He will not disappoint or abandon you.

Soren Kierkegaard, in an essay entitled, “Followers, not Admirers,” writes:

*It is well known that Christ consistently used the expression ‘follower.’ He never asked for admirers, worshippers or adherents. No, he calls disciples. It is not adherents of a teaching, but followers of a life Christ is looking for…. His whole life on earth from beginning to end was destined solely to*
have followers and to make admirers impossible.

What is the difference between an admirer and a follower? A follower is one who strives to be what he admires. An admirer keeps himself personally detached. He fails to see that what is admired involves a claim upon him, and thus he fails to be or strive to be what he admires.

(On the other hand) the follower aspires with his whole strength to be what he admires. And then remarkably enough, even though he is living amongst a ‘Christian people,’ he incurs the same peril as he did when it was dangerous to openly confess Christ. …. In the face of this, the admirers will be become agitated with the follower. Even these words will disturb many – but then they must likewise belong to the admirers (Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard, compiled and edited by Charles E. Moore, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2003).

If you find yourself irritated, you may be discovering the admirer within you – yearning to become a follower. If you find yourself inspired by Abraham and Jesus to “accompany God on the journey of faithful discovery,” then, MOVE. Follow him.
At the heart of Christianity, in the essence of discovering who we are and to whom we belong, we must get up and move. We must raise our hands and offer our services to others. We must make the coffee, give the gift, open the door, step out of troubling or toxic situations and become partners with Christ on his journey of joy.

“Trust enough to follow him.” This is the essence of Christianity. Or in the words of Jesus, “walk with me in the same way I am going.” Amen.

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